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PSALMS XC-CL.

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J. ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

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THEIR SPIRITUAL TEACHING

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A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY
Edited by the Rev. C. H. IRWIN, D.D.

THE PSALMS

THEIR SPIRITUAL TEACHING

By the

Rev. J. ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

Vol. III. Psalms XC.—CL.

FOURTH IMPRESSION

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PSALMS XC to CL

PSALM XC

1. Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.
2. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.
3. Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.
4. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.
5. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.
6. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.
7. For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.
8. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.
9. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.
10. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.
11. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.
12. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.
13. Return, O Lord, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants.
14. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
15. Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.
16. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.
17. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

PSALM XC

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

Psalm xc.

THIS is the only Psalm in the Psalter which is ascribed to Moses as the author, and if we could believe that it was written by him, it would be interesting exceedingly.

The Mosaic Authorship.

But it must be confessed that what it says of the life of man does not harmonize with the age of Moses himself and his relatives.

What God is.

To us, it is of little consequence who wrote the Psalm; it is everything Who inspired it! Perhaps no other Psalm touches Human Life so gravely, so simply, so solemnly; sets it to such music; paints it in such lasting colours. It consists of a striking contrast between the Life of God and the Life of Man.

A Dwelling-place.

Three things are said about God: the first being that He has been (or *is*!) the 'Dwelling-place,' the Habitation, the Abode of Man 'in all generations.' Some have regarded these words as referring to the people of Israel. But I can trace a wider meaning here. It is said of all the generations down from Adam. For all men, made in His own image, God is the only true Resting-place of the human spirit. Many, alas! never lived in that Home nor knew it: but as we recognize it for ourselves, we

Psalm xc. come the nearer to the true life of Man which is immortal.

Unchangeable. The second thing said about God here is His *unchangeableness*. 'Thou art God' (ver. 2). El. The Strong, the Almighty! When the mountains were being cast up, and earth and sea were separating, and the world below and above was appearing, and ages were passing thousands and thousands of years ago: yet all the time, and times, 'Thou art God';—no change in Thee! This is a grand Psalm tune: here is a great poet and thinker!

Eternal. The third thing said about God is already implied. Not only His unchangeableness—but His Eternity! He always was! as He is now! and ever shall be! There never was time, nor Eon, nor event, where God was not. Nay, if we can take in the thought, there is no time with God: neither Past nor Future! It is all Present. God is not touched by change. God is not old: God is!

There is no date to the Godhead of God. Before Creation—the true Moses dated Creation 'In the Beginning' (Gen. i. 1). That is not the Beginning of God, but the Beginning of Creation! All this is suggested, implied, whispered, in this Psalm.

Man's Death. Next, in contrast with the Eternity of God, the Psalmist pauses to contrast it with the state of man. And the contrast is twofold: as to his beginning and his end. Man is but of yesterday. But it is not that end of the contrast which strikes the writer so much. The life does not continue long. The Creator of man's life here soon brings it to an end. The everlasting One turns man to Destruction.

'Thou sayest, Return, ye children of men.' Return? To what or where? Is he not alluding to the familiar words in Gen. iii. 19: 'Dust thou art, and unto *Dust thou shalt return*'? He who had written in ver. 2 of the Story of Creation (Gen. i.), writes in ver. 3 of the sentence passed in Gen. iii. The contrast is still occupying his mind—between God's Eternity and man's short life. 'A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past; or (even) as a Watch' (one Watch) 'in the night!' (ver. 4). Is not this a wonderful word about God? One Day of His is a Thousand Years. The Crucifixion took place as it were yesterday. Nay, one Watch in the night (the space of three hours) is equal to a Thousand years of Human History in the sight of God. To the Psalmist this was real. He meant what he said, because he had such a view of God and of God's Eternity.

Psalm xc.

God's Day.

He (the Psalmist) passes again to the lower level, to say something more of the short life of man. His thoughts about it take three shades. (1) First the many ways which all lead to—*Death*. Sometimes by a 'flood,' which sweeps away a multitude; sometimes in a sleep, coming early: like the grass which flourishes in the morning and is withered at midday. (2) In Death and its approaches we see *the anger of God* against sin and sinners; even when our lives do not meet with outward disaster they pass quietly, as a tale that is being told. God sees beneath the smooth surface. He sees secret sins; He sets them in the light of His countenance. Nothing is concealed from Him, and His wrath against all sin is great!

Death.

Psalm xc. (3) Even when life is not cut short, but runs the appointed course,—What is it? 'The days of it' are seventy years, and sometimes eighty years. Even then their 'pride' is 'labour and sorrow.' The extended days, of which we are tempted to be proud, 'soon' pass, and vanish from the earth. All this is set in contrast with that which fills the first part of the Psalm—the Eternity of God.

The Prayer of the Psalm. Such are the solemn and beautiful reflections of a pious mind on the life of man. And what a prayer closes the verses. In the six verses (12-17) there

Seven Petitions. are seven petitions, which cannot be too carefully meditated.

1. 'Teach us to number our days,' that we may come to be *wise*! Hearts learn wisdom, when God teaches. And we must always be at school: we learning, and God teaching!

2. 'Return O Lord; how long? Let it repent Thee concerning Thy servants!' Have we driven God away from our daily life and thoughts, and made Him leave us to ourselves? O that He may turn, and return, to us! O that He may draw us to Himself once again!

3. 'Satisfy us,' and that 'soon,' in and with Thy mercy! That our souls may find how good it is to serve Thee; that we may 'rejoice and be glad all our days.' Whether few or many. To be glad and rejoice '*all* the days.' What a description of the possible life of a man! What a turn is given to the somewhat sad monotone of the Psalm with its meditations on Death! 'Glad and rejoice all our days!' Satisfied with God!

4. Yes, 'make us glad,' after the sorrows of the past, the defeats we have encountered! Let these be the measure of our new gladness. Let the Day of Life improve as it lengthens! Let the sunset be beautiful and calm! Let the gloom of the past be only the background out of which the light shall shine on to the end! Psalm xc.

5. 'Let Thy work . . . and Thy glory appear unto Thy servants and their children.' Let my work be not only mine, but God's work. And may our children partake of the work and see the glory! What a blessing for old age! What a transfiguring of man's life!

6. 'Let the Beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us!' *The Beauty of God! The Beauty of God!* On me; *in* me! What is God's Beauty? Is it not *Holiness*? The same thought as is put in Heb. xii. 10, that 'we might be partakers of His Holiness.' *This* is the Beauty of Jehovah—Holiness! Let this Beauty be upon us!

7. 'And establish Thou the work of our hands upon us!' This is the last petition. All spiritual blessing is met with the question, often doubting, often cynical, often sad—but *will it last?* The Psalmist does not ignore the doubt. But he triumphs over it. Yes, if God establish it! If God take our work, make it His, then it lasts! That is what the Psalmist desires, for himself, and us, and the life of feeble men!

PSALM XCI

1. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

2. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

3. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

4. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

5. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

6. Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

7. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.

8. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

9. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation;

10. There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

11. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

12. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

13. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

14. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.

15. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.

16. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

PSALM XCI

THE ARK OF SAFETY

A BEAUTIFUL Psalm, containing in its heart that promise by which Satan tempted our Lord (see vers. 11, 12) in the wilderness. This association connected with the Psalm may well follow us in our interpretation. It is true of the people of God: it is still more true of the Son of God. The Love which guards us is the Love which guarded Him. The promises to the Master include us also. The Talmud speaks of the Psalm as a Talisman. It is full of remembrances of Deuteronomy (chaps. xxxii. and xxxiii.); and it almost echoes half a chapter of Job (chap. v. 17-23). But it attains a higher level than either in personal trust and peace. Psalm xci.

The first verse of the Psalm sums up its tenor—the blessed Thesis which it undertakes to prove. The verse may be read in two ways: either as an antithetic parallel statement, after the manner of Hebrew poetry; or as the description of a state of soul followed by an outward blessing. If the latter be, as I think, the truer meaning, it asserts that the secret condition of the soul is to be in communion with God. And then from this comes the blessing of dwelling safely beneath the outstretched Wings of God. Note how the truth is emphasised by the The Key-note.

Psalm xci.

double Names of God here used. 'The Most High' —*El Elyon.* It is a title often used in the Psalter (19 times, I think), but very seldom in the rest of the Bible. It occurs first in Abraham's interview with Melchisedec, 'The Priest of the Most High God.' And the meaning of our verse here is, 'He who lives in secret Communion with the Most High God.' The other title given to God, here translated 'The Almighty,' *Shaddai,* is only used twice in the Psalter (here, and in Ps. lxviii. 14).[1] The whole verse therefore bears the meaning, *the Man who dwells in secret Communion with the Most High God, shall abide under the protection and overshadowing care of The Almighty.* And that is the subject of the Psalm.

Two Voices.

Here, as in some of the other Psalms, we have apparently two voices, one answering the other. In ver. 2 the Psalmist speaks in his own person, 'I will say'; in ver. 3 the Psalmist is addressed, 'He shall deliver *thee*'; in ver. 9 he addresses God (as it should perhaps be rendered), 'Because Thou art, O Jehovah, my refuge'; and in ver. 14 God Himself speaks, 'Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him.' This Divine Voice goes on speaking till the Psalm ends. Such is the freedom from restraint which the trusting servant of the Lord enjoys in his private personal dealing with his Lord.

[1] The use of Shaddai in the O.T. is peculiar. It is found 6 times in Genesis (where it is revealed by God Himself); 2 in the other Mosaic Books; 2 in Ruth; 4 times in the Prophets; and *31 times in the Book of Job.*

The soul which thus lives in secret Communion with God, comes to know Him well. He tells (ver. 2) what he has found God to be. He is a *Refuge*, or Hiding-place in Danger or Distress; He is a strong Fortress, in which, for the time, we may safely and quietly live; He is something more, which can only be described by saying that He is *My God*, my own God, and no one can tell all that is included in that: but one thing can be said, that 'In Him, I will trust.' That is enough for me, whether others understand it or not.

Psalm xci. A Description of God.

Yes: a voice comes in reply, of One unseen. God so trusted, *delivers*, *covers*, and *shields* His servant. Here are some of the evils from which He delivers. There is 'the Snare of the Devil' (compare ver. 3 with 2 Tim. ii. 26). There is 'the *noisome* pestilence,' the destroying plague. There is 'Terror by Night, and the deadly arrow by Day' (vers. 5, 6). And He does all this by being Himself the Personal Refuge. 'He shall cover thee with His feathers and under His Wings thou shalt trust: His Truth' (or Truthfulness) 'shall be thy shield and buckler' (ver. 4). His feathers,—says a French author—soft and warm, but not very *strong!* His shield and buckler, strong, but rather *cold*. Ah! but *both* His feathers and His shield—they give both comfort and security! The thought of hiding under the wings of God, was one that went home to the heart of Jesus Christ, as we see from His saying when He looked at Jerusalem, this Psalm being no doubt in His mind (Luke xiii. 34). I have had occasion this very day to look at chickens resting under the

His Deliverances.

Psalm xci.

wing of the mother hen, everything covered by her wing, and only the beak of the chicken visible beneath. What a shelter! What a place to flee to! What a comfort! The Psalmist had so looked on; and he had taken to his heart the thought,—*God is that to me!*

The Great Promise.

The voice speaking to the Psalmist goes on to describe some great calamity, when 'ten thousand were to fall at his right hand,' but in the midst he was to be unhurt. He was 'to see' it, but not to suffer. And then there comes that great Promise which has made the Psalm ever memorable, because it not only included its writer, but it reached out to the Son of God on earth, and it extends to every one of the People of God who so 'dwell' in Him. 'He shall give His Angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone' (vers. 11, 12). These are beautiful words, simple enough for all to understand, but precious enough for Angels to envy, who are themselves the watchers. And it is good for us to remember the first appearance of the 'Herald Angels' at the Incarnation, who were there for more than to announce His birth. Then, at the Temptation of the Wilderness (Matt. iv. 11) they were near enough to hear the Devil quoting the promise (or mis-quoting it!), and they immediately afterwards 'came and ministered to Him.' Then, amid the Blood and Tears of the Moonlit Garden (Luke xxii. 43), 'An Angel appeared unto Him from Heaven strengthening Him,'—only One 'appeared,' but no doubt a host was around!

Then on the morning of the Resurrection Day, 'the Angel of the Lord descended from Heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the Door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow' (Matt. xxviii. 2, 3). Thereafter, some of the other Angels lingered, to meet the women with the news, 'He is risen, as He said.' And again we see the Fulfilment of the Promise when the Band of Angels met the ascending Lord near Bethany, so many that they seemed a cloud of glory in the sky, to welcome Him. All this was included in the Promise of the Psalm, in its application to the Son of God. And something of it, how much we dare not say, is meant also for every Believer, who is now 'dwelling in the Secret Place of the Most High.'

Psalm xci.

Yes! for that is the burden of these promises with which the Psalm concludes, spoken by the Voice of God Himself (vers. 14-16), 'Because he hath set his love upon Me, . . . because he hath known My Name.' God promises *seven* things. 'I will deliver him'; 'I will set him on high'; 'he shall call upon Me,' it is a privilege even to pray and ask, of God Himself, and in God's very sight; 'I will answer him,' the voice being heard, and thrilling through the soul; 'I will be with Him in trouble'; 'I will deliver him,' and again repeated so that there may be no mistake: 'I will honour him,' think of that! 'I will satisfy him,' even in 'long life'; 'I will show him My Salvation!' Is there much more that a Believer could ask, than this Psalmist says had already been promised to him?

The Concluding Promises.

PSALM XCII

1. It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High:
2. To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night,
3. Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound.
4. For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands.
5. O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.
6. A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this.
7. When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever:
8. But thou, Lord, art most high for evermore.
9. For, lo, thine enemies, O Lord, for, lo, thine enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered.
10. But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil.
11. Mine eye also shall see my desire on mine enemies, and mine ears shall hear my desire of the wicked that rise up against me.
12. The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
13. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.
14. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.
15. To shew that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

PSALM XCII

A SABBATH PSALM

Psalm xcii. Thanksgiving and Joy in God.

THIS Psalm begins by thanking Jehovah and rejoicing in the opportunity of praising Him. And it pours out these feelings in Music, on the ten-stringed Instrument, on the Psaltery, and on the Harp. There are souls which express their deepest and strongest feelings in this way; for whom Music is a chosen Instrument by which their Faith and Hope find utterance before God; souls which seem to have already a touch of Heaven within. And they rejoice to remember that God's works contain the secret of Music everywhere—the song of birds, the murmur of waters, the undersong of insect life!—from which things such men themselves have learned what they know of it. To others this is an unknown land, but they hope to know more of it, in a higher state. Already the Psalmist has learned: he is before us in this thing also. Wherefore he is glad, with a joy which cannot be silent, which must *sing*'; but the song has been taught by God. Again we are thankful that a Jewish Psalmist has learned that true Piety is not a mournful cry but a joyful song. We believe in Heaven!

God's Works.

From his own state, he now turns to a contemplation of God's works. In a sense, it is *Science*

Psalm xcii.

which he is referring to; the study of the Works of God in Nature. Only he goes a little deeper than others are accustomed, or even willing, to go. For beneath the works of God, he strives to read God's thoughts, both in Creation and Providence. These are two words (ver. 4): the 'work' refers to the daily rule of God in the world; the 'works of Thy hands' to the wonders of creation. It is specially the creative works that lead him on to God's 'thoughts,' which are 'very deep.' Alas! most men think nothing of these, never get so far as to look at 'God's thoughts.' Men who live for the world, who care only for earthly advancement and prosperity, never think or dream of the marvellous thoughts of Jehovah, which lie underneath. Yet for the true interpretation of the things which are seen, we need the remembrance that there are unseen things of far more importance. When the wicked are seen in power and place, doing as they will, we must look on and be content to wait, if we would understand!

God on High.

Here the Psalm reaches its highest level, and announces the great Central Truth which it would teach. 'But Thou, Jehovah! art (most) High for evermore!' (ver. 8). The line stands out from all the rest. It is a Confession of Faith in itself. And it is a practical Faith, which has been taught the Psalmist in daily life, which meets all difficulties with a smile, and which has brought that gladness of heart with which the Psalmist looks upon them all. Jehovah's enemies shall be scattered: we must wait to see it. But for everyone who serves and honours Him, the 'horn shall be exalted like the horn of a

unicorn,' and he 'shall be *anointed*' (nay, shall be *drenched*) 'with fresh oil.' Such an outpouring of oil shall be upon the soul in its new-found joy, as cannot be expressed. The only parallel passage we know is that of 1 Cor. xii. 13, where the Believer is said to be 'drenched with the Spirit.' Such is the Blessing of the Soul, who has triumphed in the works of Jehovah, and has gone beneath the works to see and wonder at 'the thoughts' of God! While thus exalted and filled with joy which cannot be expressed, the thought occurs of the enemies who are now so triumphant. The truth becomes apparent that they have met the doom which God has threatened against evil men. Our translations intensify without cause the feelings of the Psalmist. There is in Hebrew here no word to indicate his 'desire' on his enemies or on the wicked who have rebelled. He says that he 'shall look upon them,' and shall 'hear' their judgment delivered by Jehovah. And no doubt he, and we also, shall look on and listen on that day, with mingled feelings; with awful thoughts! Out of which shall arise the Confession, that God doeth all things well; and is as Holy on the Judgment Seat, as He is in Heaven! Psalm xcii.

Turning from the terrible anticipations of the last Judgment, the Psalm goes on to rejoice in the manifestation of God's goodness to His people here as their closing days approach. No doubt there was something in the Psalmist's own position, or in that of some dear relatives, to suggest the subject. He had seen the palm tree flourishing. This is one of the many allusions to it in Scripture, though it is The Old Man's Blessing.

Psalm xcii.

a strange fact that the fruit of the Tree is never mentioned in the Bible, unless this ver. 14 be admitted as the exception.[1] But here the Tree is set forth as the Image of a Believer spared to 'old age,' flourishing like the Palm Tree, or as a Cedar in Lebanon. 'And in old age, when others fade,' they shall still bring forth the fruit of Peace and Righteousness. *Evergreen*, like the Palm Tree; *rejoicing* in the Sun; *casting* a *pleasant shadow* over the weary and the needy; with sustaining *fruit*; and even to the end beautiful and attractive as in former days. And this, not because they are anything in themselves, but 'to show that Jehovah is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.' How great a thought it is, that the world will form its opinion of God from what it sees of and in His servants! We hold the Name of God in our hands, either to bring it into discredit, or to lead others to say, 'What a God is ours!'

[1] There is a marginal reference to 'dates' in 2 Chron. xxx. 5, but it is not well founded. My dear friend, the late Dr Andrew Bonar, once asked me the question, 'Why is it that the fruit of the palm tree, the "date," is never mentioned in Scripture?' The reader may find interest in searching for a reply.

PSALM XCIII

1. The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with majesty ; the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself : the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved.
2. Thy throne is established of old : thou art from everlasting.
3. The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice ; the floods lift up their waves.
4. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.
5. Thy testimonies are very sure ; holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever.

PSALM XCIII

KING JEHOVAH

Psalm xciii.

THIS Psalm is the first of a group called by some 'the Royal,' by others 'the Theocratic,' and by others the 'Accession Psalms.' They are eight in number, and extend to the hundredth Psalm inclusive.

The Group of Psalms.

The eight Psalms set before us in various aspects the fact of the Kingship of Jehovah. This is the teaching which in the Old Testament is parallel to the great truth of the New Testament, *The Kingdom of God*. The O.T. tells of the King; the N.T. of His Kingdom. For the fact is that in O.T. times the Kingdom had, in its spiritual sense and reach, not yet come; had not been revealed, had hardly been set up on earth.

This group of the Accession Psalms is perhaps the chief passage conveying this message in the O.T. They are all short, 87 verses altogether (not much longer than some single Psalms in the Psalter). They are all largely of the same character, but contain much teaching, with the keynote of joy.

The King's Proclamation.

The present (93rd) Psalm is the Proclamation of the King, and asserts His Rank and Origin and Power and Glory. Short as it is, it seems to divide into seven portions, telling in a word or two much concerning Him, and setting forth His Majesty.

King Jehovah

Psalm xciii.

It begins by the statement that *Jehovah reigneth.* Strange to say, this claim for God begins with the Psalter, save for two words spoken by Samuel (1 Sam. xii. 12; xviii. 7). But in the Psalms the truth is again and again insisted on, and in the Book of Isaiah.[1] Here, in the Psalm before us, it is solemnly affirmed. His dominion is not specified: it is not confined to Israel; indeed a far wider Kingdom is evidently in the writer's view. Nor let it be supposed that the statement is a commonplace. On the contrary, it is one of the few fundamental truths. It is the Secret of Nature. The whole Earth and the Universe, of which it is part, have Jehovah as King. A living, personal Being with Intelligence and Power. Beneath all the appearances and changes of things lies the Existence, all powerful and everlasting, Whom we call God. He is Creator and He is Ruler. Almost everything outside of Redemption is included in that 'Jehovah reigneth.' Nor let it be forgotten that the name Jehovah represents that the King is the Covenant God.

The second thing told us here is that God wears as His Royal Robes the Attribute of Strength. His Majesty rests on His Power (ver. 1). The Mightiness of God fills the whole Psalm. The awful power of the elements is set against it, and the Might of God is greater far. 'The world is established; it cannot be moved' (ver. 1). The

[1] This group of Psalms presents constantly passages which are paralleled by others in Isaiah, so much so, that some have thought that that prophet is the author of these Psalms.

Psalm xciii. Psalmist has risen to a wonderful conception of King Jehovah.

The Throne. The Throne of God (ver. 2) is the next thing which is brought into the picture. And the truth which is added here is that it has been 'from everlasting.' Before the ages of the Earth; before the Day or Creation; the Psalmist goes back as far as thought can go. He evidently means that God had no beginning; that He always was: and that He always was King, and Ruler.

The Voice of the Floods. Next comes a reference which may either be regarded as a general statement, or points to some great event which testifies to God's greatness. 'The Floods have lifted up their voice,' with great noise. It may mean, say most commentators, the sea, the rivers, the ocean, and the storms which rage over them. But it may have a more special reference—though the word here for 'floods' is not that which is used in Genesis to describe the Deluge, it is once so used in the Book of Job (xxii. 16). 'The reference to the Deluge is admitted by nearly all commentators,' says Canon Cook in dealing with that passage. Hence we are, I think, entitled to believe that the reference in the Psalm is to the Deluge also. And it gives a definiteness of meaning to the allusion which is otherwise lost. The most awful fact in past history to Jewish writers looking back, was the destruction of the Race in the days of Noah. Even then, says one Psalmist, God sat as King. And in all the storms and tempests since He continues to rule, as is indicated in the Hebrew.

Next, the Psalm states that King Jehovah has

revealed His Will in 'His Testimonies,' which 'are very sure' (ver. 5). This is one of the words which the Psalmists use to indicate the Written Law delivered at Sinai, and here it is specified as one of the marks of God's reign over men. He asks for obedience and for intelligent obedience from man, as well as passive obedience from the powers of Nature. 'He is a great King.' Psalm xciii. A King! Great and Holy.

Then the chief characteristic is added in a single word (ver. 5), '*Holiness.*' It may come, in the order of our thought, after self-existent power, but it conveys more knowledge of Jehovah, and reaches higher than any other truth about Him. Indeed, the truest definition of Holiness is *the character of God.* And I venture to say that, if this word of the Psalmist were all that had been revealed to us by him, and set against all the moral teachings of Heathenism, this word and the verse which contains it would outweigh them all.

There is another thought conveyed in the Psalm before it concludes. It is concerning '*the House of God*' (ver. 5). It means, of course, His Temple at Jerusalem: and in the present setting it means *the Palace* of the King! It might be supposed that this is a small thing, after the great truths about God of which we have been reading. But that were so only to careless and superficial thought. The teaching which centres in the Temple is the Holiness which becomes His worship and His House. The Sanctuary.

To this, then, the Psalm brings us. Great, great is King Jehovah; but what He demands in service from His people is that they should be holy Are we satisfying this Demand of God?

PSALM XCIV

1. O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.
2. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud.
3. Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?
4. How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?
5. They break in pieces thy people, O Lord, and afflict thine heritage.
6. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless.
7. Yet they say, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.
8. Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise?
9. He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?
10. He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?
11. The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.
12. Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law;
13. That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked.
14. For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.
15. But judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it.
16. Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?
17. Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.
18. When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.
19. In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.
20. Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?
21. They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood.
22. But the Lord is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge.
23. And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yea, the Lord our God shall cut them off.

PSALM XCIV

THE KING'S ENEMIES

The second of the group of 'Theocratic' Psalms is one that deals with the enemies of King Jehovah's Throne and People. It is not without significance that this aspect of His Reign should be dealt with so early and so prominently. Some critics have failed to see the connection, and have even suggested that this Psalm does not belong to the group at all, and interrupts the line of teaching. But they have forgotten that the King of Zion is not yet acknowledged in the greater part of His dominion, and that the great multitude of His lawful subjects know Him not, or refuse to obey. Hence there is no thought which, next to His Sovereignty, obtrudes itself more than the King's Enemies. Psalm xciv.

He is addressed as 'Jehovah the God to whom vengeance (or justice) belongeth' (ver. 1), who has threatened punishment on the evil, and who will assuredly fulfil His words of warning. And though there are many attributes of a very different kind, which the subjects and worshippers of Jehovah would naturally turn to, yet the existence and turbulence of His enemies force this ominous fact into prominence. He is the King and 'Judge of the Earth' (ver. 2); and the Psalmist appeals The Judge who will punish.

Psalm xciv.

to Him, to 'lift up' Himself and His righteous cause. His enemies are many; they are in the meantime triumphant; they are proud, boastful, oppressive, and ruthless. They talk loudly. And as for any appeal to God, or thought of Him, they are contemptuous. If there be a God at all, they will take *Him* into their own hands. 'Jah will not see, neither will the God of Jacob consider' (ver. 7).

A Warning.

Turning from this description, the Psalm addresses these boastful ones in person. O ye who have no thoughts higher than the earth, to whom the Eternal and Infinite are nothing! '*brutish* among the people' (ver. 8); who are but 'fools,' because the folly of your life is so great—is God really ignorant of what goes on? He made the eye of man and beast, does He not Himself *see*? He made the ear, does He not hear? Source of all knowledge, does He know nothing? 'God of Jacob,' did He not interpose for the lonely and weary patriarch, and bring him out of all his troubles? Well does He know the vanity of your thoughts, and futile indeed are these before Him! Be warned now; beware!

The Judge chastens His own.

But these evil men not only bring themselves into danger; they are the means of creating trouble for all about them. One of the mysteries of life is that the servants of Jehovah suffer from the ill deeds of His enemies; and yet these sufferings become their chastisements in the hands of the King, so that the afflictions of God's people rise before the Psalmist as he writes. *He* has learned wisdom in such things, and even by means of them. These have become his teachers, because he was willing to learn. He does

not resent such troubles. He has even ceased to wonder at them. They bring a Blessing. Listen and wonder—'Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Jah! and teachest him out of Thy law!' (ver. 12). Something comes to the believer through God's chastening which comes not otherwise. The sweetest form of humility is born in submission to God in trouble. There is an understanding of ourselves and of our own position. There is an insight into the meaning of God's 'Law' and what it requires. There is a revelation as to God Himself, which is found nowhere else! It gives 'rest' (ver. 13)—that is, peace—in the days of adversity, and patience to wait God's time in dealing with the evil around. Jehovah will never 'cast us off,' nor 'forsake His own inheritance.' God is our portion and we are God's portion on the earth!

Psalm xciv.

'Judgment shall return unto Righteousness and all the upright in heart shall follow it' (ver. 15). It is a strange expression, though the general meaning is clear. Possibly the poet's eye has seen the apparent disappearance of God's Justice for a time, leaving the evil of the land to do their will; and many of the upright, cast down and sad, leave their places for a time. But God returns: He sits again on His throne as Judge, and seeing Him, the upright flock back, confident that all is to be made clear. Then the Psalmist's voice is heard asking (ver. 16), 'Who will rise up *for me* against the evildoers?' and he has his answer. After a little he takes up the strain again, and tells that 'Unless Jehovah had been his

God will vindicate His own.

Psalm xciv.

help, his soul had almost dwelt in silence' (ver. 17). He must have died, but Jehovah *had* come to the rescue. When his foot was slipping (ver. 18): at that very moment the Hand of Jehovah had grasped him, and 'held him up.' What a flood of thoughts still rise at the remembrance! And the result is that God's 'comforts delight his soul!' (ver. 19). The change is complete. He is like another man. He is happy beyond words. He is confident now that all such fears as had taken hold for a time are foolish. He asks almost in surprise now: 'Shall the Throne of Iniquity have fellowship with Thee? Rulers and judges who 'frame mischief by a law,' who bind themselves together to defeat the righteous and condemn the innocent! No; henceforth he will never believe it. Jehovah is the defence and the rock of His people. The King is Judge, and will deal with the enemies of His Throne in due time and in His own way. 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'

The Comforts of God.

PSALM XCV

1. O come, let us sing unto the Lord : let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.
2. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.
3. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.
4. In his hand are the deep places of the earth : the strength of the hills is his also.
5. The sea is his, and he made it : and his hands formed the dry land.
6. O come, let us worship and bow down : let us kneel before the Lord our maker.
7. For he is our God ; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice,
8. Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness :
9. When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work.
10. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways :
11. Upon whom I sware in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.

PSALM XCV

JOYFUL IN THE KING

Psalm xcv.

Two things connected with this Psalm give it exceptional interest and entitle it to a large place in our hearts.

The first is the extraordinary use of it in the Church. In the Church prayer-books, and in the 'Sarum Use,' as it is called, it is, and has been since the fourth century, part of the public service every Lord's Day, in thousands upon thousands of churches.

The Voice of the Holy Ghost.

The other thing that gives to the Psalm exceptional weight is very different but not less striking. There are not many passages in Scripture where the Holy Ghost speaks in the *First Person*. One of the most remarkable of these is Heb. iii. 7-11, where the writer of the Epistle quotes this 95th Psalm, introducing his quotation with the words, 'As the Holy Ghost saith'; where the Holy Ghost applies to Himself the words used in the Psalm, 'Your fathers tempted ME'; 'I was grieved'; 'I sware in MY wrath.' Let us then, as we read and comment on the Psalm, hear the words of the Holy Ghost!

The Joyful Song.

We turn then to the first portion (1-7), which begins in a joy which cannot be restrained. 'O come, let us sing unto Jehovah: let us make a joyful noise; let us meet His face with thanksgiving;

let us make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms.' Four utterances, crowded on each other, to utter the joy of the heart. Think of that as being possible for a gathering of Old Testament Jews! There is the greatness of Jehovah, the Great God and King, the One living and true God! And there is the great fact, that He is the Creator of all, and holds in His Hand the earth and the sea. Think of the joy of the worshipping people, as expressed in these opening verses. Psalm xcv.

But note also how this somewhat ecstatic joy is followed by a different sentiment — the feeling of awe in the Presence to which they have come! 'O come, *let us fall prostrate with our faces on the earth*' (for that is the meaning); 'let us kneel before Jehovah our Maker' (ver. 6). And here too, it is the whole being of the man which speaks, for two reasons are added for our so doing. 'He is *our* Maker,' not only of the world, but *of us*. And He is 'our God,' in covenant with us; He has become our Shepherd, and taken us for 'the people of His pasture and the sheep of His Hand' (vers. 6, 7). And these two facts, instead of lessening His awfulness in our sight, have only increased it. The more we know of God, the more we adore Him. His very goodness and care lead us to more absolute devotion! Our joy in God, which leads to the outburst of singing and thanksgiving, concurs absolutely with the sense of God's greatness and perfection which make us fall prostrate before Him. The Humble Worship.

We come to the second part of the Psalm, which begins in the middle of our 7th verse, and which is The Holy Ghost saith.

Psalm xcv.

so different in feeling from what goes before. It is a solemn warning against falling into sin, strengthened by a reminder of a great sin in history, committed, apparently, under similar temptation.

'To-day'!—this part begins emphatically. Here is a lesson which generation after generation may take as one *for the day*. 'If ye will hear His voice'! There are two senses in which these words may be taken. The one is, 'If ye should hear His voice to-day,' if there should come to you suddenly one which you recognise as the Voice of God, then this is what ye must do! But this is probably not the meaning. The Voice has spoken, ye have heard its sound, ye know what God would have of you. But will ye hearken? And will ye obey? 'To-day, if ye will hearken, *this* is the lesson: *Harden not your hearts!*"

The Hardening of the Heart.

What is meant by 'hardening the heart'? *It is persistently doing what you know to be wrong!* God's command is clear, you know it; but you *will* not obey. God's claims are strong, but you *will* not yield to them. God's mercies are great, but you will not let your heart melt as you think of them. That was what Israel did in the 'provocation in the wilderness.' It was the tone of their life there during forty years. It was specially true of them on the two occasions referred to in the Psalm at *Massah* and *Meribah*, the temptation and the strife, the temptation of God, and (probably) the strife among themselves. One occasion was at *Rephidim* before they came to Sinai, and one at *Kadesh* shortly before Aaron died. In both there was temptation

and in both strife, but apparently Rephidim had the former element more largely, and Kadesh the latter. The same is true 'To-Day.' It has a strange relation to the Two Tables of the Law, the sin against God and the sins against our Neighbour. 'Hardening of the heart' is connected with both. Let us be warned against it. And let us learn (from the voice of the Spirit of God in Hebrews), how He is 'grieved' by it. Think of His telling His people in Apostolic times how He had been 'grieved' at Rephidim and at Kadesh—telling it more than 1500 years after! And should any be so callous as not to be moved by that thought, let them take to heart what follows—'So I sware in My Wrath, that they should not enter into My rest!' Here is God's Grief; here is God's Oath: and here, farther on, in sight, though not in possession—here is God's Rest. Psalm xcv.

It is a lesson from the Past of Israel, showing on the one side God's Infinite Mercy and Readiness to do everything for His People. But it shows on the other that nothing can induce God to break His Word; that His Mercy and Love have not in them a trace of what men call *weakness*! What a Deliverance came to Israel from Egypt, and what Powers of Miracle interposed on their behalf! But even they could not disobey God and defy Him at pleasure. Presumption brought forty years of wandering, and death in the desert. The lesson of the Past is good for 'To-Day,' and for the Future. The Oath of God guards the Covenant, and also the conditions of the Covenant. The Holiness of God means punishment, as surely as it means reward. The Past and To-Day.

Psalm xcv.

The Rest of Canaan was for the obedient; not even for Aaron nor Moses when they fell. And now we begin to understand better, how we must not only sing to Jehovah with a loud voice, but how *we must also fall prostrate,* when we go to meet His face.

There is 'a Rest which remaineth for the people of God.' Let us 'take heed not to come short of it.' Let us shelter under the Oath! Let us not defy it!

PSALM XCVI

1. O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth.
2. Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day.
3. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people.
4. For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods.
5. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens.
6. Honour and majesty are before him: strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
7. Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength.
8. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts.
9. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.
10. Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously.
11. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof.
12. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice.
13. Before the Lord; for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.

PSALM XCVI

A MISSIONARY PSALM

Psalm xcvi.

THE present member of the group of Royal or Theocratic Psalms is one which sets forth with clearness and force the duty of making Jehovah known to other nations. It is a Missionary Psalm.

A New Song.

With the exception of a few variations, this Psalm is found in 1 Chron. xvi. 8-33, where with another (Psalm cv.), it is given as David's Song of Praise when he brought up the Ark of God to Zion. The expression in ver. 1, 'a new song,' seems to show that this Psalm was the original form, and was afterwards adapted by David himself to the occasion mentioned in the History.

All the Earth.

What an emphasis is laid, from the very beginning, on the world-wide Empire which King Jehovah rules! Ten times in these thirteen verses is this testimony given, directly or indirectly. 'All the Earth' (ver. 1) is called on to sing; His glory is to be shown (ver. 3) to 'the nations'; and among 'all the peoples'; He is (vers. 4, 5) to be 'feared above all gods.' Nay the 'gods of the peoples are *nothing*' (as the word means); it was (ver. 5) 'Jehovah that made the Heavens'; all the 'Kindreds of the peoples' (that is, peoples of all descent and generations) are to 'ascribe to Jehovah the glory due unto

His Name' by them (ver. 7); 'all the Earth' is once more (ver. 9), called on to tremble and be prostrate before Him; the 'nations,' the 'world,' the 'peoples' (ver. 10), are told to acknowledge Him; and once again in the closing verse (ver. 13), they are warned that the 'world' and all its 'peoples' are to be judged by Him when 'He cometh.' Psalm xcvi.

In this Psalm, where the duty of making Jehovah known to all is so plainly recognised, do we find any reasons given why such a mission should be undertaken by the people of Israel? To this question the answer implied at least, if not stated, is the wonderful joy with which God's people are filled, which is so great that it can hardly be expressed. The reiteration of feeling, and even words, which is found in the Psalm, and which would be intolerable were it in the least unreal, is most remarkable. Note some of the repetitions, which seem quite natural, and are clearly not exaggerated. 'Sing, sing, sing (vers. 1, 2); 'bless, show forth, declare' (vers. 2); 'give, give, give glory' (vers. 7, 8); 'worship, fear, say' (ver. 9, 10); 'rejoice, be glad, roar, be joyful, rejoice' (vers. 11, 12). Observe how forcibly we are all taught the joy of truly serving the One God; that there is nothing of slavery or terror in it; that it is not an effort to escape punishment, or avoid evil, but a real outburst of hearts which have found refuge and happiness in finding God. Contrast this with what we read of idolatry and those who practise it. Contrast it with the state of men who have no God, or do not know whether they have or not. Contrast it with the Why should Jehovah be made known to All?

Psalm xcvi.

feelings of those who merely know of God's existence, but have never had a thought of His Love and Fatherhood! Then we find reasons for the Psalmist's joy, and a foundation for the duty which he here urges on all who read.

Why so glad in Jehovah?

And there is more than we have yet said. The reasons for this joy in God are set forth again with reiteration, as if the writer could not utter all he knew and felt. We gather these reasons from every part of the Psalm. There is God's 'Salvation' (ver. 2); His 'Name,' His 'Glory' (vers. 2, 3); His 'Wonders' (ver. 3); His 'Greatness' (ver. 3); 'Honour,' 'Majesty,' 'Strength,' 'Beauty' (ver. 6); His 'reign' (ver. 10); His future 'Judgment' (ver. 13), which shall be carried out in 'righteousness' and in faithfulness, according to His word. The great outstanding facts in this call of the Psalmist to make known the truth of God are His Holiness and Justice, the greatness of His power, and His faithfulness. On Him His people may rely, and all the Earth should worship Him. They will find it a happy and blessed exercise so to do.

We must not close without calling attention to an addition to one of the verses of the Psalms, which, though now believed to be an addition to it, is of very ancient date, and exercised for many years the expositors and the lovers of the Book.

Verse 10 formerly stood, so long ago as the time of Justin Martyr (A.D. 114-165. See Dial. with Trypho, chap. lxxiii): 'Say among the heathen that Jehovah reigneth *from the Tree.*' This was understood to be a prediction of the power of the

Cross which was the Throne of the Son of Man, and Justin charges the Jews with having struck it out. It is not too much to say that for centuries this was a cherished word in the Church of Christ. It appears in an old Latin Hymn, which has been happily translated :— Psalm xcvi.

'Fulfilled is all that David told
In true prophetic song of old :
Amid the Nations God, saith he,
Hath reigned and triumphed *from the Tree.*'

PSALM XCVII

1. The Lord reigneth ; let the earth rejoice ; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.

2. Clouds and darkness are round about him : righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.

3. A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about.

4. His lightnings enlightened the world : the earth saw, and trembled.

5. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.

6. The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory.

7. Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols : worship him, all ye gods.

8. Zion heard, and was glad ; and the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O Lord.

9. For thou, Lord, art high above all the earth : thou art exalted far above all gods.

10. Ye that love the Lord, hate evil : he preserveth the souls of his saints ; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.

11. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.

12. Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous ; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.

PSALM XCVII

THE REIGN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Psalm xcvii.

STARTING from some recent manifestation of Divine power in storm or earthquake, this 'Royal Psalm' recalls the words of Exodus (xix. 16) and Deuteronomy (iv. 24, v. 22) as to the Giving of the Law at Sinai. The writer is full of joy as he thinks of God's reign and power. 'The Lord is on His Throne,' let the whole 'earth' rejoice, especially 'the Isles' of that great Mediterranean Sea which is so close to Palestine (vers. 1, 2), but of which the Jewish people knew and saw but little. Far above the earth God's throne is surrounded by 'clouds and darkness': these are its 'habitation,' or its 'foundation,' as others translate. Out of the darkness goes forth a 'fire' which 'burneth up His enemies round about' (ver. 3). The great storm which recently took place was too awful not to leave its mark upon the page—the 'lightnings,' the 'earthquake,' the streams of lava, flowing like 'wax' down the side of the 'hills'—these showed forth 'the glory of Jehovah in the sight of all the people' (ver. 7).

Manifestations of God.

All this does not terrify the Psalmist. It makes him confident in God. He calls on the Idols of the

Psalm xcvii.

Heathen, and probably also on the Angels in Heaven, to fall prostrate before the Lord. On your faces, ye Idols all, like Dagon at Ashdod! Worship the King on Whom you wait, all ye Angels! Jehovah is the King of all the earth! And he is not alone in his joy. For the great events which he remembers here set Zion free. 'Zion heard and was glad: the Daughters of Judah rejoiced because of Thy judgments, O Jehovah' (ver. 8). It was the greatness of *their* God which was demonstrated! Zion could laugh as she sat down in safety, beneath the shadow of His wings!

A Practical Outcome.

Then follows, in another strain, a practical outcome to the worship offered in the Psalm. One of the weightiest words in the Psalter is found here (ver. 10). '*Ye that love Jehovah, hate evil.*' Of the two sides of this saying, one knows not which is the more striking. To *love* Jehovah! This is the first and great commandment, which ought to have been familiar to all Israel. But the verses before, telling of the greatness of God, have shown us Angels and Idols on the ground, in the Dust, at His feet. How then shall *we* stand, or how regard Him? *With* 'LOVE,' is the Psalmist's reply. Has the wondrous privilege given us, to 'love God,' ever been put in a more striking fashion? When we see God on His Throne, in Majesty, with all Heaven around, how *daring* it seems to say, that we *love* HIM!

Another Side.

But the other side of the practical teaching of ver. 10, is hardly less wonderful. 'Ye that love the Lord, *hate evil.*' Jehovah and Evil are the two irreconcileable enemies!

Evil has a Throne of its own ; and its coveted place is the Human heart. It is a lawless rebel which seeks the solitary soul, to rule there. And the great lesson of a clear sight of Jehovah's Majesty is to hate the Evil, which would be His Rival. Evil, in every shape and form, must be hated. In the transforming power of Divine Love, the pleasures of Sin turn, even as we look, into its pains and horrors. Psalm xcvii.

See how the verse goes on to set before us two of the great doings of God. 'He preserveth the souls of His Saints.' He 'delivereth them out of the Hand of the Wicked' (ver. 10). See the danger, and how near it has come. The Wicked One has already laid hands on the trembling servants of God. Are they lost? Is their case hopeless? But what a comfort is written here! What God does for His Own.

The Psalmist tells us that God delights to deliver in such a danger. Out of the very hands of Satan He delivers us.

'Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart' (ver. 11). Probably we must not press the Image of *sowing seed* which is to bring forth fruit. It may be rather the scattering of the light in the dew-drops of the morning, when the sun shines on them, that is intended. The dew-drops of light, one on each leaf, make glad the heart. The soul which has first been awed by the majesty of God, and then affrighted in 'the hand of the Wicked,' is covered with the Dew of God's Spirit and made glad with a holy joy. How Joy comes again.

And so we come to the last verse—the summing up of this lesson drawn from the Throne of Jehovah.

Psalm xcvii.

'Rejoice in Jehovah, ye Righteous.' He cannot repeat *that* too often, or emphasize it too much: it is to be joy, joy in God all the way. And should the joy show any symptoms of passing away, there is added a new and final thought for our meditation.

The Final Lesson.

'And give thanks at . . . the Remembrance of . . . His Holiness (ver. 12). I know it is not easy to understand, or to take home what this means. It even takes time, silence, thought, to see that there is anything wonderful in it. But how strange for us to feel thankful for—the Holiness of God! It is that which terrifies so many! It is that which has so often terrified ourselves! There is much to thank God for: His pardon, His mercy, His tenderness, His Gifts; but—*His Holiness*?

Yet, that is at the root of everything. Grace, Pardon, Mercy—are only parts of that Holiness! That is the Centre of the character of God. Love itself, by which St John names Him, is but one side of Holiness. Till we have taken that thought home, we have not understood God. So long as the remembrance of His Holiness gives us a pang, and brings terror, we do not know the true sweetness which lies in God's Love.

What sort of man was this Psalmist, who nearly one thousand years before the Incarnation, could so live, and so write?

PSALM XCVIII

1. O Sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory.
2. The Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen.
3. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.
4. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.
5. Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm.
6. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King.
7. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.
8. Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together.
9. Before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.

PSALM XCVIII

THE KING COMING TO JUDGE

Psalm xcviii.

A Psalm of all true Hearts.

THIS is a Psalm which is independent of the circumstances in which it was written, and indeed, of the author from whose pen it proceeded. It is suited to all occasions, and to believing hearts in all lands and centuries. It stands in some Prayer Books as an integral part of the public service, and is sung or chanted as the worship of thousands every Lord's Day; and it is just as useful and fitting for the secret closet. There is not a cloud on the sky; the sun shines in every verse; yet there is neither blinding radiance, nor burning heat! The Septuagint attributes it to David; but a recent Commentator has traced no fewer than seventeen parallels with the latter portion of Isaiah. We have other testimony to the fact that the prophet assimilated readily the work and even the language of others: but whether he borrows from the Psalmist, or the Psalmist from him, is of no great consequence for the spiritual meaning and teaching of the Psalm.

God's Salvation.

It begins by calling for 'a New Song' in view of the marvellous works of God, and because He has gotten 'the victory,' or as some prefer to translate it here, 'the Salvation.' Note how often the Psalmists

call for 'new songs,' because they have found something 'new' in God or God's works which they have never seen before. And note how God's 'Salvation' is a victory, and God's victories 'Salvation,' because the whole work of God for His people is a Warfare against the Powers of Evil; and every soul won is a trophy for the King! The rejoicing with which the Psalm opens, is not so much for something *done*, as for something *shown*. That is, God known in His doings, is what has made glad the singer's heart. Mark the 'marvellous things': the 'right Hand,' the 'holy Arm,' the 'Salvation,' which God has made known. Mark, above all, the Righteousness which has been 'openly shown in the sight of the Heathen'; the 'Mercy and Truth towards Israel'; and the 'Salvation of *our* God' which has been seen by 'all the ends of the Earth' (vers. 2, 3). Hence the Psalm calls on all to praise and be glad in God; 'the whole earth' is to shout, to rejoice, to sing praise. And he means all he says: he does not write without thought. See how he discerns between the 'mercy' which enters into the Covenant with Israel, and the 'truth' or faithfulness which is shown by keeping it. Mark again, the variety of word and phrase, which tell how difficult it is to convey all that is meant. Even when he calls for sacred music to be added to sacred song, the same difficulty is manifest. The harp, the trumpet (shofar, the ram's horn, or cornet), and the straight trumpet (like a reed), all are to join in the Lord's praise. But these do not measure his desire to present a worthy offering. The sea and streams are to take

Psalm xcviii.

Mercy and Truth.

Psalm xcviii.

part. The huge waves of the 'great sea'; the foaming streams from the hills; the floods are to clap their hands, and the hills themselves to be joyful. Nothing less can satisfy the heart of this Singer of Israel.

Why so glad?

But can we bring to a point this wonderful outpouring of praise and rejoicing? Why should there be such rejoicing? In order to set right things which had gone wrong on earth; to overturn the wickedness which had been so long in power; to judge the world with Righteousness, and the people with 'faithfulness,' according to the warnings and promises of God. It seems a wonderful thing that a sinful man should contemplate with rejoicing the great Day of Judgment to come. But here it is not a question of himself and what shall happen to him, that the Psalmist is pondering. It is the setting right of the whole course of things: the overthrow of Satan, the restoration of the fallen world, the justification of Jehovah in the sight of all. Any soul which has felt the burden of sin cannot but rejoice at the thought of such a Day of Judgment and Restoration. Yet it is wonderful to find such a spirit in the world so long ago, in the dim light of the ages. Where, out of Israel, could such thoughts be found at that time?

The New Testament Stand-point.

Yet there is special light on this very thought to be found in the New Testament. Not in disagreement with the Psalm: on the contrary, in perfect harmony with it; but carrying us into a new field, and opening up a marvellous vista in the future. It has been revealed that the Judge who is to try

the earth and the sons of men, is that Man whom God hath ordained' (Acts xvii. 31); 'God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ' (Rom. ii. 16). Nay, we have this Revelation from the Lord Himself—'The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all Judgment unto the Son' (St John v. 22). So that while we read the closing verse of our Psalm, we substitute or insert His Name—'Let the hills be joyful together, before the *Lord Jesus*' (v. 9). Psalm xcviii.

And there is another thought, not only covered by the Psalmist's words, little as he knew himself of their full meaning, but exactly expressed by them. In order to 'judge the world,' the Lord Jesus is to 'COME'! He is to come in His glory, and all the holy Angels with Him, and 'then shall He sit on the Throne of His Glory, and before Him shall be gathered all Nations' (St Matthew xxv. 31, 32). It is His own description. The event referred to is one of which the New Testament is full, from Matthew to Revelation. We dare not, indeed we cannot, read the Psalmist's words without completing their meaning by reading into them our New Testament teaching. It is not what the Psalmist meant, but what God meant through the Psalmist. As we do this, it is for the first time clear how we can look at this Day of Judgment as a theme of joy. The greatest joy of the Future, the brightest prospect of the World, is the Second Coming of Christ! No man can rob us of that joy. No man can rebuke the reading of that joyful truth into this closing verse of our Psalm. '*Let* the world and they that His Second Coming.

Psalm xcviii.

dwell therein, with floods and hills, be joyful together before the Lord — for HE COMETH.' *He cometh again,* 'to judge the earth, with righteousness, with faithfulness, according to His Word!'

PSALM XCIX

1. The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved.
2. The Lord is great in Zion: and he is high above all the people.
3. Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy.
4. The king's strength also loveth judgment: thou dost establish equity, thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob.
5. Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy.
6. Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the Lord, and he answered them.
7. He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar: they kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them.
8. Thou answeredst them, O Lord our God; thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.
9. Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy.

PSALM XCIX

THE TER-SANCTUS

Psalm xcix.

'*Holy—Holy—Holy!*' The Prophet tells us that this is the Song of the Angels (Isa. vi. 3). The beloved Apostle says it is the Hymn of the Cherubim (Rev. iv. 8). Is it surprising to find that the Heavenly Song is the survival of a Psalm—the one which is before us now? Like all the praise of Heaven, it is learned on earth, before it is used in glory. '*Holy—Holy—Holy*' (vers. 3, 5, 9).

Jehovah is Holy.

Here is the great truth which the Psalm affirms, and which distinguishes it and the other parts of the Old Testament in which it is affirmed, from all the World's teaching before the coming of Christ. A truth of which Greece and Rome never dreamt, to which Buddhism came nearest, but left unknown, that the Supreme Being, the Eternal, is Holy. Compare it with the teachings concerning the Gods of the Nations, and the worship offered to them, and supposed to be acceptable; and may we not claim that this is the highest thought of Antiquity about God, that 'He is Holy'?

Proclaiming Him King.

The Psalm has three parts, each introducing its great chorus of praise. It begins by proclaiming Jehovah as King, at whose approach the people

tremble : it sees Him 'sitting between the cherubim,' the sacred Cloud covering Him and filling the Tabernacle or the Temple, and the whole 'earth' shakes at the sight of His glory. He is in Zion, He is high above the people, 'Most High'; His Name is 'great and terrible'—*terrible,* not as to be dreaded by His own worshippers, but only as to be deeply reverenced : 'He is Holy.' Psalm xcix.

The second part of the Psalm is very short (vers. 4-5), but contains much food for thought. 'The King's strength' does not despise Justice, determined to do only as it will ; but loves it, as the rule and directory of its actings. God Himself doth establish and ensure Equity : and in Jacob it carries out judgment and righteousness always. Yes! Jehovah! Jehovah our own God, is to be exalted ; let us fall prostrate before the Ark which is His Footstool (1 Chron. xxviii. 2) ; let us not forget 'He is Holy.' He is Just.

The third part goes back to the story of Israel feeding the heart with remembrance of God's doings. Of the great men of the past, it is not the three Patriarchs, but the three Deliverers—Moses, Aaron, Samuel—which are named. Something apparently determines the names ; some personal association. Samuel, perhaps, was an ancestor of the Psalmist. Moses and Aaron among His priests ; and Samuel 'among them that call upon His Name.' And what is it in these men which is selected, or which of itself occurs to the writer as most memorable? It is *that they were men of prayer ;* men who proved that Heaven and Earth could commune, and hold intercourse. Not so far apart but that a voice in one His Servants.

Psalm xcix.

could be heard in the other! The cry of earth heard within the veil: and the answer of God heard in the home and closet. These men 'called on Jehovah and He answered them' (ver. 6). What a solution of the difficulties that some men feel about prayer. It has been worked out. Experience tells. Men have had answers to their prayers. So many and so clear that they could not doubt. And God does not change. 'He spake: . . . they kept His testimonies and the ordinances that He gave them' (ver. 7).

The Answerer of Prayers.

Yes: 'Thou answeredst *them*, O Jehovah our God'! (ver. 8) He takes his own confident assurance to God in prayer. Thou dost answer! Thou hast answered all through our History! Thou art 'the Hearer of Prayer.' No doubt they, and we, are unworthy—we have sinned; and we deserve only punishment. But Thou dost pardon; Thou 'forgavest them'; though Thou didst punish them for Sins! We too will go to Thee: forgive us, O Jehovah, for Thy Name's Sake!

Let us then exalt Jehovah—Eloheenú: the Lord our God: let us fall down and prostrate ourselves at His Holy Hill of Zion! We have such a God, to trust, and to praise, and to obey, and to adore. 'JEHOVAH—ELOHEENÚ—HE IS HOLY.'

PSALM C

1. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.
2. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.
3. Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
4. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.
5. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

PSALM C

JOYFUL BEFORE THE LORD

Psalm c.
A Familiar Psalm.

If we were asked, Which of all the Psalms has come home most to the heart of men of all climes and ages? the answer would be, the Hundredth Psalm. Partly, no doubt, this may be due to music which has been attached to it (Luther, I see, gets the credit of the tune from some, but others give it to a Frenchman of the name of Bourgeois); and partly among English people to the excellent translation into verse made in Reformation days by a Scotchman whose name was William Keith. But there is more than these. The Psalm itself uttering sentiments in which all can join, of a joyous and most cheerful spirit, strong and manly in tone, the very singers exalted by the noble thoughts which are uttered, has appealed and still appeals to men, as no other does. Everybody knows it. Everybody loves it. It loosens voices which seldom take part in other psalmody, and unites for the moment all who profess to worship God.

And what is the substance of the Psalm so much valued and so often sung? It is sometimes said to be the Doxology which concludes the group of 'Royal' Psalms: but I observe that there is in it no allusion to the Kingship or Throne of Jehovah, and

hence prefer to regard it rather as the opening Psalm of the next group. **Psalm c.**

First of all, it is what may be called a *Universal* Psalm, addressed to 'all people that on earth do dwell.' Here, then, we find what is always welcome, a proof that the Jews could, and did, take home the truth that the Religion which they held was to extend to all men, and that Jehovah was yet to be acknowledged as the One God, by the whole earth. **Universal.**

Next we find a forcible statement of the truth that to be a follower of the Holy God was not in itself to be sorrowful and sad. The Psalm before us by no means stands alone in this respect, but it very unmistakably exposes the folly of such a charge made by careless men. Would that all Christian people habitually lived and worshipped in this joyful frame! 'Make a joyful noise; serve with gladness; come with singing.' If this were so generally, Christians would be more esteemed and more envied. Let us be happy ourselves, and find our joy in God, and then our very example will kindle a similar fire in others. **Joyful.**

The Psalmist goes on to give reasons for this happy frame. His reasons are threefold. The Jehovah whom he praises 'is God,' the only true God; God is his Creator, who made him by His own power, by a word; we are His people, and His sheep, whom He claims as His own, and whom He feeds, and cares for. The beautiful Image of the Sheep and the Shepherd is here found again, though it does not here rise to the wonderful picture in the 23rd Psalm, **Why so Glad?**

Psalm c. of the Single Sheep, and the Shepherd who claims him. But how great a thing it is to believe—and *to know*—that the Great God, the Creator, and the God of Providence, whom we worship, prostrate on our faces, cares for us and keeps us as His flock!

Praise Him. So then, the Psalm continues, addressing, as before, 'all people,'—'Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise; be thankful, and bless His Name' (ver. 4). We can see the great procession which was before the mind of the writer: he pictured to himself, as we may do, the people entering the gate, passing on through the Court of the Women, into the Court of the Men; all the time singing, a note with every footstep; with 'thank-offering' and thanksgiving (for both are mentioned), while ever and again through the song the great Name is heard, Jehovah, Jehovah Eliheenu! Jehovah our God!

Again: Good Reason. And once more, as a closing bar of musical song, they have other reasons for their joy. 'Jehovah is *good*' (ver. 5): pause over the word, see how true it is; see how much it implies! 'His mercy' is not only for to-day, for the present season, for one's life: it is 'everlasting'! God's mercy is never going to fail, or cease. Whenever and wherever I meet Him, I shall find and meet 'His mercy'! And 'His truth,' His faithfulness to His word and promise and people, 'endureth to all generations' (ver. 5). To our children, and grandchildren; to the future generation; to the centuries to come! What a triumph lights the close of the Psalm! It is probably three thousand years since the Psalmist

wrote these words, whoever he was: and to-day we all say, Yes; he said not more, he said less, than the truth about his God and our God! Nay, we can say more than he did, following up his words, 'God's mercy and truth are for Eternity; and the fulness of the truth can only be known when we are in Eternity ourselves. 'THE LORD IS GOOD!' Psalm c.

PSALM CI

1. I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord, will I sing.
2. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.
3. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.
4. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person.
5. Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer.
6. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me.
7. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.
8. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord.

PSALM CI

MY VOWS

HERE is a sketch of what a Believer would like to be and to do, on undertaking some new position in life. Psalm ci.

There are two thoughts which strike us at once in the opening verse. The Psalmist is going to sing of Mercy and of Judgment: *mercy*, which gives, and considers, and forgives, and is gentle; *judgment*—that is justice, and something more, the outward shape which justice takes, in weighing merit and demerit and adjudging the proper treatment to each. Yes, a very good subject for poem or psalm, very fruitful, varied, and difficult; one would like to see it well treated, as it deserves. But no sooner has it been mentioned than something strikes the writer, and 'gives him pause.' Does my reader see what it is? It is that something is more needful at the moment than a poem: and that is, *a prayer*! For he stops his soliloquy, and adds, 'Unto Thee, Lord, will I sing!' (ver. 1). And all the rest of the Psalm continues as a prayer. It is no longer a speaking aloud to oneself, as we often do when there is no one nigh, saying, 'Yes, I shall do this thing at any cost, and I shall not be ashamed or afraid!' How much softer, how much more solemn, how much more Mercy and Judgment.

Psalm ci. sustained, how much more helpful to us, when the talk with oneself becomes a talk with God! Shall we see how much of it we can make our own?

Communion with God.

With some heart searching, the Psalmist feels that the new beginning must be in his own behaviour. 'I will behave myself wisely, in a perfect' (that is, a straightforward) 'way.' And then, that thought again becomes prayer—'O when wilt Thou come unto me?' In other words, he looks to the Presence of God, and to daily communion with Him, as the seat and source of all holy life. And it is so. A new heart is not our making, but God's giving. Good resolutions need to be kept, but they can be kept only through God's grace. He must teach us that changes are needed in our life; and then He alone enables us to make them, and to keep in the line of the life after it has come. 'Work out your own Salvation, with fear and trembling; FOR it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do' (Phil. ii. 12, 13). Of course we are enabled to see all this more clearly than the Psalmist could. The groundwork of the teaching is to be discerned in the Psalm, though I confess that it is not quite so prominent here as in some of the other Psalms. One would even say that the Psalmist is not here at his best. He is taken up more with promises than with prayers, more with his resolutions than with trust. There is prayer and there is trust, but there is more of his own resolutions than of either. He will, however, be watchful: and he both hates and fears the tendency in his own heart and life to get

away from God and to fall into evil. He hates the 'practice of depravities' (ver. 3): he knows how evil 'cleaves to him,' in the power of some evil habit. He knows how his own house has been far from what it should have been; henceforth he will 'walk within it with a perfect heart' (ver. 2). The home life is sometimes the hardest life. Temptation often has its centre at home; is busiest there; and the work of resisting it there brings no applause. Yet where can Christ be honoured more than in circumstances like these? The opportunities of service at home are far more frequent than those met anywhere else. No doubt, as the Psalmist says, we should seek to have believing servants and helpers, those who do not 'deceive,' nor 'tell lies' (ver. 7): and where we cannot find these ready made, we can seek to bring to God those already within the house. That is the best way of securing godly helps, though it is not always the way taken by Christian masters.

Psalm ci.

Home Witness.

All this was in the view of the Psalmist, and he lays bare his heart unto Jehovah, asking Him to judge the sincerity with which he speaks, and trusting Him for grace to carry his vows into effect. He seems before the close to point at a wider sphere, as if he had power to rule beyond the walls of home. 'The City of God' (ver. 8) seems to be so far within the range of his influence. But there too he will do the same: good people only shall be his friends; he will depend on them; he will fear and avoid all who do not fear God. Very practical, and very determined: his past experience has been

Resolutions.

Psalm ci. teaching him. And this, too, should be our outlook for future years, and our resolves. Only let us do it all in dependence upon Him, and not on ourselves; and in constant trust in the sufficiency of His presence and His grace!

PSALM CII

1. Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee.
2. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily.
3. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth.
4. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread.
5. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin.
6. I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert.
7. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.
8. Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me.
9. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping,
10. Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.
11. My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass.
12. But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations.
13. Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.
14. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.
15. So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.
16. When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.
17. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.
18. This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord.
19. For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth;
20. To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death;

21. To declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem;
22. When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord.
23. He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days.
24. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations.
25. Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands.
26. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed:
27. But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.
28. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.

PSALM CII

THE PRAYER OF THE DESTITUTE

Psalm cii. Three Parts.

THIS Psalm is naturally divisible into three parts— so naturally, that Canon Cheyne makes them three Psalms. The first (1-11) is the story of personal sorrow and distress; the second (12-22) a hopeful prayer for mercy on Zion; the short third part (23-28) is the light which God's Presence and Eternity cast upon the Psalmist's sorrow.

The Story of Sorrow.

Nothing could be more touching than the story of what the writer was suffering, in body and soul, in the intervals of his writing. 'My days are consumed like' (or *in*) 'smoke,' passing away in the breeze. 'I have eaten ashes like bread' (ver. 9.), ashes have been my food, and tears my drink. 'My heart is smitten and withered' (ver. 4), 'So that I forget to eat my bread.' The pain and weakness of hunger are so like his other pain, that he cannot distinguish them. 'My days are like a shadow that *lengtheneth out*' (ver. 11). Yet he is not an old man, he is still 'in the midst of my days' (ver. 24). All this is the sad estate to which he has come. Hezekiah's illness was something that might have been so described. But perhaps the lot of an

Psalm cii. exile in Babylon, sick and utterly cast down, hoping for the return of his people, but not expecting himself to live to see it, may fulfil even more of the conditions of the language here. 'He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days' (ver. 23).

God and His Mercy for Zion.

The second part of the Psalm shows us the writer rising for a little above his own individual sorrows. It seems to begin with the thought of God's Eternal Being. 'Thou, O Jehovah, shalt endure for ever: and Thy remembrance unto all generations' (ver. 12). A new sight of God makes a great change in the soul. When we come to see more of God's glory we begin to understand more of His ways, and to see our own condition in its due proportion. He cannot be dwarfed and narrowed into the conditions of our little life. The solitude in which the sick man finds himself (vers. 6, 7) is broken when we think of the Eternal One ever by our side. In the time of trouble He is with us as we suffer. He *brings*, He does not send comfort. And we cannot measure His acting by days or years. So the way is paved for the thought of Mercy for Zion, which has been long promised, and the time for which is nearly come. For Jehovah loves it. If His 'servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof' (ver. 14), loving her not the less in her ruin and desolation, much more does God, the Builder of Zion, care! Mark the three things said about Zion in the Psalm, and how they go on from less to more. 'Mercy upon Zion' (ver. 13)—that is something sure and precious. 'Jehovah shall build up Zion' (ver. 16)

—that is something better, mercy shown practically, ruin reversed, good times once more. 'The name of Jehovah in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem' (ver. 21). Here is everything, at last, the Temple rebuilt, the dust swept away, the worship of God restored, the psalms of praise echoing once more in Jerusalem. Psalm cii.

Then, in the third part of the Psalm, the personal trouble, in the most natural way, comes again to the front. It cannot be long forgotten, for it makes itself felt by pain. But now it comes under the light of God's presence. It is met by the sufferer now, side by side with God. Meditation on His Eternity and on Zion's future gives a different aspect to this sorrow of his own. He brings it and lays it at God's feet. There is a note of hope in his words. '*My* God!' '*Thy* years!' He is thinking of creation 'of old,' the Earth and the Heavens made by HIM! 'They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment: as a vesture shalt Thou change them and they shall be changed; but THOU ART THE SAME, and Thy years shall have no end' (vers. 25, 26). What a grandeur in the thought! What memorable words! And to come from a sick man, so feeble, so hopeless but an hour ago! And in that great Future, when the Eternal One should be the same as ever, 'the children of His servants, and their seed, should be with Him, safe and blessed, and established even when the Earth is withering, and the Heavens are passing away. My Sorrow in the Light of God's Presence.

It is no doubt with some surprise that we remember how familiar these later verses (vers. The Messiah found.

Psalm cii. 25, 26, 27) sound to us, and that they have become so from their use in the New Testament. I quote verbatim from Heb. i. 8-10-12 (Am. Rev. Ver.): 'Of the Son he saith . . . Thou, Lord, in the beginning, didst lay the foundation of the Earth, and the Heavens are the work of Thy hands: they shall perish, but Thou continuest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a mantle shalt Thou roll them up, as a garment, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.' Be it observed that the Epistle teaches that this is addressed to the Son of God, for Jesus Christ was the Creator of all things. It also states that these words were spoken by God the Father Himself. The words were *inspired* by the Spirit of God, and therefore carry with them the sanction of God. So we accept them and thankfully acknowledge how much there is in the Old Testament and in the Book of Psalms that we could not discover for ourselves, but which we do deeply value when taught by Him who teaches us in all things!

PSALM CIII

1. Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
2. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:
3. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;
4. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies;
5. Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.
6. The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.
7. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.
8. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.
9. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.
10. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
11. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.
12. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.
13. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.
14. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.
15. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.
16. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.
17. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;
18. To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.
19. The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.
20. Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.
21. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.
22. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul.

PSALM CIII

A TALK WITH MY OWN SOUL

Psalm ciii. Few Psalms have found their way more surely to the heart of Christians everywhere than the 103rd. It is ascribed in the title to the pen of David. We should almost grudge it to another author; for I am not sure that David has ever been more successful than here. Let me give a very short but, I trust, not a useless analysis.

Four Alls. 1. Note the *four alls* of the first few verses. 'All our faculties' (ver. 1); 'all our mercies' (ver. 2); 'all our iniquities' (ver. 3); and 'all our diseases' (ver. 3).

2. Note next the *six* things which God does for us. He 'forgiveth'; He 'healeth'; He 'redeemeth'; He 'crowneth'; He 'satisfieth'; He 'reneweth' (vers. 3-5).

Reasons for Thanksgiving. 3. Then note *eighteen* reasons for blessing and praising God which the Psalm enumerates, and do not omit to observe how precious each one is, even if it stood alone.

(1) God executeth judgment for 'all who are oppressed' (ver. 6).

(2) He made known 'His ways unto Moses' (ver. 7) —the habits of His working, things of which we say, *they are like God.*

(3) He made known 'His acts,' His doings, to the children of Israel; something less secret than His ways; the story of the Past, of which the Bible is so full. **Psalm ciii.**

(4) 'Jehovah is full of compassion and gracious' (ver. 8)—what a view of God, the very first thing here to be said of what He is. **What God is and does.**

(5) 'Jehovah is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy' (ver. 8). It takes some time, and much provocation to make Him angry; but 'mercy' is always abundant!

(6) 'He will not always chide' (ver. 9)—will not be always *chiding,* like an unwise mother, who never ceases to find fault!

(7) He 'will not keep His anger for ever' (ver. 9). He will not 'keep it up,' as men say; it is the only thing which God has ever been said to 'forget' (Heb. viii. 12).

(8) 'He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us after our iniquities' (ver. 10). He has not dealt with us *solely* on the ground of justice; this has not been His only rule. Thank God for that!

(9) 'As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him' (ver. 11). What a wonderful comparison! The blue heavens are not higher nor greater than the mercy of our God!

(10) 'As far as the east is from the west' (ver. 12). How far is that? The East and the West are separated by the whole breadth of the earth, and can never approach each other! Yet 'so far hath He

Psalm ciii. removed our transgressions from us' (ver 12). How complete is His forgiveness!

(11) 'Like as a father pitieth his children' (ver. 13)—his little children, in their pain and troubles—'so Jehovah pitieth them that fear Him' (ver. 13). His own children.

(12) 'He knoweth, He remembereth, that we are dust' (ver. 14)—not to despise, but to pity!

(13) 'Man's days are as grass,—as the flower of the field—the wind passeth over it—and it is gone' (vers. 15, 16). Beautiful is the picture of man's frailty, and his short lifetime here. The 'flower' is often lovely, but how soon it fades!

(14) 'But the mercy of Jehovah is from everlasting to everlasting' (ver. 17)—when did it begin? when shall it end?

(15) 'His righteousness is unto children's children' (ver. 17)—to the little grandchildren who gather about our feet, and learn of us to fear Him!

(16) 'To such as keep His covenant' (ver. 18)—how precious that covenant is! and how sure! But *we* also must keep it!

(17) 'Jehovah hath established His throne in the heavens' (ver. 19)—let us rejoice in its stability—it cannot be shaken.

(18) 'His kingdom ruleth over all' (ver. 19)—none are too poor or small to be under His rule—none too great or strong to be subject to it.

A Trilogy of Praise.

4. Then there follows a Trilogy of Praise. It might almost be called a *Trinity* of Praise, for it is probable that the Three Persons are in view—

Let the great angels bless the Father, they

who dwell in His presence, hearing His voice (ver. 20). Psalm ciii.

Let all His ministering hosts bless the Spirit of God, who sends them forth to do His pleasure (ver. 21). Who is to praise God?

Let all His works, in all places of His dominion, bless the Creator Son, who made them all.

5. And then there follows another voice, solitary, and still, a solo, heard alone, saying, 'Bless Jehovah, *O my soul!*' (ver. 22). It is David's voice, speaking to himself! singing to his own soul! The same words as those which open the Psalm, when he began to speak and sing. But he did not *then* know how much reason he had to do it! He did not remember all! Now, his heart is almost too full for words! Is it any wonder that it should be so? And is *our* heart—mine—yours—as full at this moment when we say,

Bless Jehovah!—O *my* soul?

PSALM CIV

1. Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great ; thou art clothed with honour and majesty.
2. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain :
3. Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters : who maketh the clouds his chariot : who walketh upon the wings of the wind :
4. Who maketh his angels spirits ; his ministers a flaming fire :
5. Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever.
6. Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains.
7. At thy rebuke they fled ; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away.
8. They go up by the mountains ; they go down by the valleys unto the place which thou hast founded for them.
9. Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over ; that they turn not again to cover the earth.
10. He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills.
11. They give drink to every beast of the field : the wild asses quench their thirst.
12. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches.
13. He watereth the hills from his chambers : the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.
14. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man : that he may bring forth food out of the earth ;
15. And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.
16. The trees of the Lord are full of sap ; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted ;
17. Where the birds make their nests : as for the stork, the fir trees are her house.
18. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats ; and the rocks for the conies.
19. He appointed the moon for seasons : the sun knoweth his going down.

20. Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth.
21. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God.
22. The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens.
23. Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening.
24. O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.
25. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts.
26. There go the ships: there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein.
27. These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.
28. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good.
29. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.
30. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.
31. The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works.
32. He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth: he toucheth the hills, and they smoke.
33. I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.
34. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord.
35. Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless thou the Lord, O my soul. Praise ye the Lord.

PSALM CIV

THY WORKS PRAISE THEE, O GOD!

Psalm civ. THE twofold thought which may be said to run through this Psalm and characterise it is, that God created the Heavens and the Earth, and that Creation is still immediately dependent on God. The two errors denied here are, that the worlds had any independent existence, coming into being by chance, or having always been; and that, once created, they have been left to chance or law, apart from Divine agency and control. This positive and negative teaching runs through the whole structure of the Psalm, and it is to be feared that we have not outgrown the need of such a testimony, but possibly require it even more than many previous generations.

Two Truths Taught.

Two Errors Denied.

The Psalm opens in exactly the same terms as Ps. ciii., 'Bless Jehovah, O my soul!' And lest this might be deemed of little consequence, the two Psalms both close with the same words as open them. And they are the only Psalms in the Book which do so. We cannot therefore pass these facts without notice, and are justified in inferring that they have the same author, and that they are both the meditations of a man with his own heart, in

The Opening Words.

secret, before God. A similar secret use of them by us is also suggested as peculiarly appropriate. Psalm civ.

The Psalmist does not, as we might expect, begin with the world, and go from it up to God. He begins with God, with 'Jehovah, *my* God' (ver. 1); his thought has risen to the highest at the very opening of the Psalm, Jehovah is in personal covenant with him, and *he* has laid hold on God in the covenant, 'My God!' Yet this has not led him to presumption. On the contrary, he has learned enough to humble him and keep him low. 'Thou art very great.' Nothing brings a man to the dust in his own estimate like a clear view of God. He is looking up, as it were, to the eastern sky, almost blinded with the light of the sun; and as he looks, one word comes from his lips: 'GOD!' 'Thou art clothed with honour and majesty! Thou coverest Thyself with light as with a garment! Thou stretchest out the heavens like a curtain!' (vers. 1, 2). In all literature we have no worthier hymn of praise to the Creator, and it is with a sense of awe that we realise this as reached by a Jew (whose name is unknown) so many centuries ago. The Story of Creation in Book of Genesis.

The story of the Creation in the Book of Genesis was evidently familiar to the writer, and inspires him verse by verse; but the treatment is so fresh, so natural and vigorous, that he almost excels the source from which he derives his material. There are eight circumstances noted by both authors, and placed nearly, though not entirely, in the same order. They agree in the first three things created. Light, the air, the waters. The historian goes on to tell of The Book of Genesis, and the Psalm.

Psalm civ.

the dry land; the poet speaks of the mountains and valleys. The historian proceeds to the ordering of the sun and the moon; the poet describes it as the arranging of the moon and the sun, and so is even more in accordance with the historian's own narrative of evening and morning being the early order of the world. The fish of the sea and the land animals come next in both, though the order again is different. And both concur in placing man last in the abode which has been prepared and adorned for him. So marked are the parallels between the two narratives, though the one is history and the other the poetry of worship.

Signs and Seasons.

We pause over one fact of Nature, which is a leading fact in science also, and which has surely a most remarkable place in the story of Creation. 'He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down' (ver. 19). Genesis has it, 'for signs and for seasons, and for days and years' (ver. 14). Down to the present day, and going back as far as history takes us, we find *that our division of time is founded upon the arrangements made at Creation* of the movements of the sun and moon in the heavens. From times untold till now these have not varied, for any apparent variations have been in cycles, returning again to the starting-point and beginning anew. They are the only world-wide arrangements of time; *they are still the only reliable marks of seasons and dates;* we make no changes on them, we do not propose any improvements. Yet there they have been from the creation of the world, and they are still! In face of

such facts, can a man question THE MIND which created all things? And may we not express our wonder[1] that Jewish historians and Jewish poets already knew such truths, and recorded them as they have done? Psalm civ.

Out of it all comes the glory of Jehovah, in His manifold works which He hath made 'in Wisdom'; His creatures 'waiting all upon Him' for 'meat in due season,' continuing only so long as He sustains them; for at His word they 'die, and return to their dust.' So long as he lives the Psalmist will sing unto God, giving praise while he has any being.' No doubt there are sinners, and these shall receive their portion; they shall be 'consumed.' But, speaking to himself in the silence and communion of the closet, he will say, 'Bless Jehovah, O my soul!' It is the Alpha and the Omega of his Psalm. And there is added, whether in its own place, or whether by chance it has been removed from the beginning of the next Psalm—it matters little—*the first Hallelu-Jah of the Psalter*—in which, let us gladly join! The Glory of God.

[1] The well-known German writer, A. von Humboldt, says of the Psalm, "We are astonished to see within the compass of a poem of such small dimensions, the Universe, the Heavens and the Earth, thus drawn with a few grand strokes . . . A picture of the entire Cosmos."

PSALM CV

1. O give thanks unto the Lord; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people.
2. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works.
3. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord.
4. Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face evermore.
5. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth;
6. O ye seed of Abraham his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen.
7. He is the Lord our God: his judgments are in all the earth.
8. He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations.
9. Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac;
10. And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant:
11. Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance:
12. When they were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it.
13. When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people;
14. He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved kings for their sakes;
15. Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.
16. Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread.
17. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant:
18. Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron:
19. Until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him.
20. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free.
21. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance:

22. To bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom.
23. Israel also came into Egypt; and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.
24. And he increased his people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies.
25. He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants.
26. He sent Moses his servant; and Aaron whom he had chosen.
27. They shewed his signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham.
28. He sent darkness, and made it dark; and they rebelled not against his word.
29. He turned their waters into blood, and slew their fish.
30. Their land brought forth frogs in abundance, in the chambers of their kings.
31. He spake, and there came divers sorts of flies, and lice in all their coasts.
32. He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land.
33. He smote their vines also and their fig trees; and brake the trees of their coasts.
34. He spake, and the locusts came, and caterpillars, and that without number,
35. And did eat up all the herbs in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground.
36. He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength.
37. He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes.
38. Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them.
39. He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night.
40. The people asked, and he brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven.
41. He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river.
42. For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant.
43. And he brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness:
44. And gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labour of the people;
45. That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. Praise ye the Lord.

PSALM CV

SO THEY BROUGHT THE ARK

Psalm cv. This Psalm appears in the Chronicles (1 Ch. xvi. 1-36) as part of the thanksgiving which David offered to Jehovah when the Ark was brought up to Zion, and found there its resting-place. For four verses he sings his '*Hodu*,' as it has been called, from the Hebrew opening—*O give thanks!* Call on Jehovah's Name! make known His doings; sing unto Him; play on an Instrument to Him; speak of all His wondrous works; boast of His Holy Name; let your heart rejoice; enquire after His strength; seek His face; remember the wondrous works of the Past! All this is an ecstatic outpouring, in making which we expect to see David once more dancing before the Lord in a joy which cannot be restrained.

The Wonderful Past.

One word, however, seems to change the current and divert it into another channel. It is the word 'Remember,' and is followed by the name Abraham.

The Story of the Nation.

From this new start of the Psalm, at God's Covenant, David goes on lovingly to dwell first on the days when the people were only a family, not a nation; few, very few, and strangers in the Land; when they had the great privilege of believing and trusting the promise that that whole Land was to be theirs, and

to be filled by them. And here the poet king introduces a word which we cannot read without a thrill. He calls some of the people God's 'MESSIAHS' (ver. 15); the same name as was put into the mouth of Hannah, at even an earlier date—'God shall anoint the Horn of His Messiah' (1 Sam. ii. 10). In any other book we should think little of such occurrences, and lay no stress upon them, but in the Bible, we know the Infinite Foreknowledge which lies beneath all, and are ready to mark what is already known to it. Psalm cv.

Another name is now before us, once very famous, but afterwards seldom mentioned — the name of Joseph. The marvellous doings of God with him ought never to be forgotten. He comes into the history just at that point where Israel ceased to be a Family, and became a Nation. And it was largely owing to him, to his wisdom, and firm statesmanship, and above all to his Communion with God, that the visitors in Egypt came into such prominence. Even Pharaoh, in a moment of insight, understood this, when he said, 'Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?' (Gen. xli. 38). Twice over in the varied history of God's people, such a thing took place. Joseph in that olden day, and Daniel in a later age—stood before Kings and declared the Wisdom of God. Here, how lovingly and lingeringly the Psalmist dwells on the older story, following it from the time when Joseph went into the land as a slave, when his 'feet were hurt in fetters,' and the 'iron entered into his soul' (ver. 18 *mar.*), up to the days when he taught Joseph.

Psalm cv. the senators of Egypt, and sent its princes to prison. How God had cared for His people!

Moses and Aaron.

Then the song of gratitude comes down to the names of Moses and Aaron. There is nothing of the Burning Bush, nothing of Moses' birth and training and shrinking from the great Mission offered him; it is Moses, the leader, the miracle-doer, the man before whom Pharaoh trembled! Eight of the plagues of Egypt are mentioned just in the order in which they occurred to the memory, the 'Darkness' coming first, and the death of the First-Born closing the list; two of the plagues are omitted, and the early wonder which was not a plague. There is no constraint; Inspiration does not fetter the free movement of the mind and heart. But how thankful to God the Psalmist is; how joyfully he goes on, step by step, to recount the mercies 'one by one.'

The Wilderness.

After the great Exodus, he tells of the wilderness life. But here again it is symptomatic of his mood, that it is God's doings which fill his mind; it is thankfulness which overflows into his song; it is Mercy, Mercy, which he delights to tell. The Cloud in the daytime, with its blessed shadow from the heat. The Light at night, making the moon seem dim—a light which was always at the Full! It is the Guide before them every day, where there was no pathway visible on the sand. It is the quails in the evening, and the manna in the morning, and the stream which followed them.

God's Memory and Faithfulness.

Yes: God remembered them all the way. He was 'faithful.' They were 'beloved, for the Father's sake.' The Psalmist thinks of nothing else but God's

goodness and care. He cannot say enough about it all. But he wishes others to follow him, to take up the same story, to be moved by the same feelings, to join in his psalm, and in the gratitude which lay behind it. And therefore he has one closing word which sums up all, and which he waits to hear repeated by his fellow-countrymen and by his readers. It is the second time that the word occurs in the Psalter, where it shall often be found afterwards: HALLELU-JAH! Praise *ye* The Lord! **Psalm cv.**

PSALM CVI

1. Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord ; for he is good : for his mercy endureth for ever.

2. Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord ? who can show forth all his praise ?

3. Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.

4. Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people : O visit me with thy salvation ;

5. That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.

6. We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.

7. Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt ; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies ; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea.

8. Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.

9. He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up : so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness.

10. And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy.

11. And the waters covered their enemies : there was not one of them left.

12. Then believed they his words ; they sang his praise.

13. They soon forgat his works ; they waited not for his counsel :

14. But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.

15. And he gave them their request ; but sent leanness into their soul.

16. They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the Lord.

17. The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram.

18. And a fire was kindled in their company ; the flame burned up the wicked.

19. They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image.

20. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass.
21. They forgat God their Saviour, which had done great things in Egypt;
22. Wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea.
23. Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.
24. Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word:
25. But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord.
26. Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness:
27. To overthrow their seed also among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands.
28. They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead.
29. Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions; and the plague brake in upon them.
30. Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed.
31. And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore.
32. They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes:
33. Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.
34. They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the Lord commanded them:
35. But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.
36. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.
37. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils,
38. And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.
39. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.
40. Therefore was the wrath of the Lord kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance.
41. And he gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them.
42. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand.

Psalm cvi.

43. Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity.
44. Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry:
45. And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies.
46. He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives.
47. Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise.
48. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the Lord.

PSALM CVI

WE HAVE SINNED WITH OUR FATHERS

Psalm cvi.

THE present Psalm makes a pair with the 105th. But while it was a record of thanksgiving—this is a confession of sin. And what makes the contrast more striking is, that they traverse the same ground, though taking so different a lesson from it. The likeness begins with the opening verses. In both there is praise. *Hallelu-Jah!* This occupies the first five verses of both; then they take their separate ways.

The Sin of the Past.

After the promise which begins it, the Psalm broadens out into two distinct portions, both of them full of matter, as, alas! they well may be. The writer goes over the history of Israel, and what he sees written everywhere on it is, *Sin*. He recites first the story of the Wilderness Wandering, and then the Occupation of the Land of Canaan.

Egypt and the Wilderness.

Note how he identifies the people with the Past, and is himself in conscience one of them. 'We, we, we'—so runs the sixth verse, impressively teaching, in the spirit of the Second Commandment of Sinai, what the Heredity of Sin too frequently is. What Israel was, that Israel still is, in his view, if not worse than before. Step by step, sin once

Psalm cvi. entered on, grows and darkens. 'Our fathers understood not Thy wonders in Egypt'; they saw the Miracles, they rejoiced in them, they boasted of them, but they 'remembered not.' He deals kindly, not exaggerating; he does not even say 'they forgot,' it is only, as yet, they 'did not remember.' But sin never stands still—'they provoked Him at the Sea of Reeds.' So in the Old Testament it is the Sea of Edom, that is: *the Red Sea*, in the New. The sins, the Psalmist says, were forgiven, and He delivered them, and 'led them through the depths as if these were the wilderness.' But the waters covered their enemies and washed them away. 'For a time Israel rejoiced and was thankful' (ver. 12); a little interval of obedience. But, alas! they soon 'forgot'; they lusted after better food; then they tempted God. He gave them what they sought, but it only brought 'leanness to the soul' (ver. 15), an awful instance of mistaken prayer. What lean souls some of us have, because God has given us what we set our hearts upon!

Idolatry. But the sin of the people waxed greater. Moses and Aaron took God's side, hence a rebellion, led by Dathan and Abiram (Korah's name, the cousin of Moses, is passed over in gentle silence, as it is also in Deut. xi. 6), brought severe chastisement in fire from Heaven. Aaron also fell, though the kind Psalmist keeps *his* name also out of the black list. So they not only 'forgot,' but dishonoured Jehovah, worshipping the 'golden calf'! And then that Moses, of whom they were so jealous, and were even ready to stone, stood in the breach, became the INTER-

cessor, and obtained pardon for their sin. But that was not the end. Baal-Peor added to the long list. Another Deliverer appeared from among the priesthood, and gained for the people respite, and for his own posterity an unending blessing from the unforgetting God of Mercy. Even Moses failed, tempted God at Meribah, and was doomed to die in the wilderness. Such is the story of the Desert and its sin in the first section of this long Psalm. Psalm cvi.

The second part of the Psalm has to do with Canaan after they entered it (vers. 34-46). And it, alas! is filled with the story of failure and of sin. They found the task of conquering those nations hard, because they attempted it in their own strength, and not in God's. They ceased after a little to attempt more, and were content to live in friendship with them and to intermarry. Instead of spreading the knowledge of the One True God far and wide, they erected images to Baal and Ashtoreth, and made their children pass through the fire to Moloch, till the land was full of idolatry and of blood. 'They sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils. They were defiled with their own works' (vers. 37-39). Canaan.

What a story of the chosen people of God! Had Moses or Aaron, the saint of the Lord, as he is so beautifully called here (ver. 16), been able to foresee it, how they would have shrunk from the sin involved! We read that 'the wrath of Jehovah was kindled against His people; He abhorred His own inheritance' (ver. 40). So that they were punished; heavily, grievously punished! Sin always is, in one

Psalm cvi. form or another. They were oppressed; they were made subject to the heathen. Time after time (ver. 43) they were delivered, only to fall again into deeper sin! Yet when they cried, and repented, and turned, the Lord heard (ver. 44). 'He remembered His Covenant'; 'HE repented according to the multitude of His mercies' (ver. 45).

The Closing Prayer. So ends this sad chapter of their history, as sad a page as the Psalter contains. One of the longest Psalms, it is filled with the record of long-continued sin. But at the close the Psalmist finds heart to pray. We almost wonder at his daring to do so. It needed no little courage to go to Jehovah again on behalf of such a people. But listen to the sad, sweet, earnest, broken-hearted cry of a penitent ashamed! 'Save us, O Jehovah, our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto Thy Holy Name, and to triumph in Thy praise' (ver. 47). How high and clear the note of the soul, rising like a bird above the turmoil and the trouble, with a song in the clear sky! As if the prayer brought rest! As if it found the beginning of its answer in the very peace of the thought of leaving it with God! Is this, then, what prayer will *always* do for us? Even when we have been carrying up to the Throne an intolerable, crushing burden of sin. Yet, if we leave it there, shall there be peace for you and me?

The Doxology. And then there follows the Doxology! Surely the strangest place for it, after such a dealing with God. And yet the Doxology belongs to the Psalm. The chronicler (1 Chron. xvi. 35, 36) quotes it as

part of David's song before the Ark. Possibly this is the origin of all the Doxologies which close the five books of the Psalter, as it is also the most elaborate in form and words. If so, it is a striking illustration for us of how God regards, and values, and blesses the broken, crushed, and contrite heart which, in the lowest depth of its sorrow, remembers and holds fast the promise and the grace of God! Psalm cvi.

PSALM CVII[1]

1. O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.
2. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;
3. And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.
4. They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.
5. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.
6. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.
7. And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.
8. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!
9. For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.
10. Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron;
11. Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the Most High:
12. Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help.
13. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.
14. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder.
15. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!
16. For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.
17. Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.
18. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death.
19. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses.

[1] With this psalm the fifth book of the Psalter begins; which we call THE HALLELU-JAH PSALTER.

20 He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.
21. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!
22. And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.
23. They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters;
24. These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.
25. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.
26. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble.
27. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end.
28. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.
29. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.
30. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.
31. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!
32. Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.
33. He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground;
34. A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.
35. He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings.
36. And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation;
37. And sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase.
38. He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease.
39. Again, they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow.
40. He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way.
41. Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock.
42. The righteous shall see it, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth.
43. Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord.

PSALM CVII

THE REDEEMED OF THE LORD

Psalm cvii.

The fifth, and last book of the Psalter opens on a keynote which notifies a change of atmosphere from the four books which have gone before. Redemption, in varied aspects, is the subject of the present Psalm.

A Series of Blessings.

'O give thanks!' *Hodu!* 'To Jehovah, for He is Good.' How much is implied in the word! All that we know of God may be summed up in it. Take all His attributes together and we may put them into this one word. It is an anticipation of St John's name for God: Love; and it is almost larger than that. Blessed is the man who, in his own experience, has already reached so far; and can say it as the utterance of his own soul!

But this word is followed by many others. God's 'mercy' is everlasting, never to lessen, and never to end. 'The *Redeemed of the Lord*' know it: they are Redeemed from the grasp of a great enemy; they are gathered from the four ends of the earth—east, west, north, and the great southern sea. Once they 'wandered' in the Desert 'alone'; homeless, faint. To Jehovah they went on, 'crying.' He

'delivered'; He 'led them' by a way which they did not know, but which proved to be the Right way, which brought them to a 'city of Habitation,' where they might rest and abide. Oh that men would praise Him for this:—for His 'Goodness,' and His 'wonderful works' done to the children of men. The 'thirsty' soul, which went on thirsting, was also supplied with water for its daily needs. It is not only one trouble which was removed, but an hourly want, supplied as often as it came. Here, again, is a Blessing (ver. 9), which may be written in letters of gold. 'He SATISFIETH the longing soul; and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.' Note the two great wants expressed by 'longing' and 'hunger'; note the supply of these—'satisfieth,' and 'filleth'; and note that it is not so much by gifts that God does this; it is by Himself. The Gift is The Giver, and The Giver is Himself the Gift. And note as one more thought, that this is founded on experience: it is what God *has* done, and is no dream; and what He *is* in the Habit of doing; what He is ready *to do* again.

Psalm cvii.

Yes: this is all illustrated by facts; by the story of the Past, which explains the large place that History has in the Bible. It shows what has been as a guide to us. These people of Israel sinned even as we do. They 'rebelled against the words of God.' They *would not*; their wills were contrary to God's. They even 'contemned the Counsel,'—they despised the advice of the Most High (if we dare so put it). And then Providence brought their punishment. Hard 'labour' brought down their proud hearts;

A Dark Time.

Psalm cvii.

the iron entered into their souls; they fell down, and there was none to help. Then and thus they were taught to pray: It was a 'cry' that entered into the ear of Him who was not far away. And He 'saved them.' Note the present Salvation in the very hour of need; how they passed out of the dark Shadow of Death; and 'the bands' that bound their hearts in misery were broken asunder. Here is new cause for men to praise Jehovah for His 'GOODNESS,' and 'His wonderful works to the children of men.'

The Stormy Sea.

The Psalm goes on (vers. 23-31) to show God's wonders by sea, as well as by land. Probably there is less about the sea in Scripture than many would desire in these modern days when commerce has extended so far. Anyone acquainted with Palestine, as it was in olden times, will understand it. There was never any great business done by sea. Tyre and Sidon were beyond it on the north; Acre does not seem to have had many ships belonging to it; Joppa was always a stormy and a dangerous coast; and Cæsarea did not draw attention till Roman times. The maritime interests of Palestine were chiefly confined to Joppa, on the Mediterranean coast, and to the inward Sea of Galilee, which is more familiar to readers of the New Testament than to those of the Old. But still allusions to sea life and dangers are not absent. In the Psalms we find descriptions, more or less graphic — in Pss. xlii. 7; xlviii. 7; lxxxix. 7; civ. 26; and in other eleven Psalms. One touch of local truth is to be found in our present Psalm—the 'going *down* to

the sea' (ver. 23); for the country round Jerusalem is high above the sea level, and a long descent is necessary before the shore is reached. The description in the text of a storm at sea is very vivid. We are reminded of the chapters in Jonah as we read. And, on a smaller scale, the fishing-boat of Galilee, with one weary Form asleep in the 'hinder part of the boat,' comes before the eye. These are the wonders of God. A storm at sea teaches us to pray—as a Spanish proverb runs. 'He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still' (ver. 29). 'He arose, and rebuked the winds, and the sea; and there was a great calm' (Matt. viii. 26). Was this Psalm in the memory of the Evangelist as he wrote? 'Oh that men would praise Jehovah for His Goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!' (ver. 31). Psalm cvii.

Other Mercies for the Redeemed of the Lord.

The Psalm is not yet done; but from this point it seems written in a different style, as if at a different time, or at least under less emotion. The Book of Job, already virtually quoted more than once, seems remembered three times in the verses which follow. The two works of wonder which remain to be spoken of, are the ruin of fertile regions by salt and bitterness, as in the case of Sodom (vers. 33, 34), and the contrary marvel of the wilderness turned into a fruitful land (vers. 35-38). A happy people are sometimes ruined, through the oppression of evil neighbours; and these wicked oppressors are sometimes brought low, the princes stripped of power, and the poor exalted (vers. 39-44). Such wonders are done by Jehovah, who holds all in His own

Psalm cvii.

hand. He ruleth! We do not know the reasons of His doings; we are often at a loss. But 'all things work together for good to them that love the Lord.' Psalmists did not quite express it so. But they touch on the same string—'The righteous see God's works, and they rejoice!' The mouth of the wicked shall be stopped! The 'wise' observe in silence, and they come to understand. The Power which is at the Helm, in storm and in calm, what is it but '*The loving Kindness of Jehovah*'?

PSALM CVIII

1. O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory.
2. Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early.
3. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations.
4. For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds.
5. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth;
6. That thy beloved may be delivered: save with thy right hand, and answer me.
7. God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth.
8. Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver;
9. Moab is my wash-pot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe; over Philistia will I triumph.
10. Who will bring me into the strong city? who will lead me into Edom?
11. Wilt not thou, O God, who hast cast us off? and wilt not thou, O God, go forth with our hosts?
12. Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.
13. Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.

PSALM CVIII

MY HEART IS IN TUNE

Psalm cviii.

This Psalm is one of those which are repeated in the Psalter, consisting of two parts, which appear in two other Psalms set down earlier in the collection.

A Repetition with Variations.

The changes made in a few words are very slight, and such as may be accounted for by the copyists. The first five verses here come from Psalm lvii., of which they form the conclusion (vers. 7-11). The last *eight* verses here are from Ps. lx. (vers. 5-12). As in other cases of repeated Psalms, the whole feeling is changed. The early part of Ps. lvii. is occupied by a cry for Deliverance from enemies which compass about the soul of the writer; and we see him advancing step by step in confidence, till at length he bursts out into a rapture seldom revealed in any of the Psalms. It is just where that Rapture begins that the words opening the present hymn are transferred. The Past is ignored. The difficulties are forgotten. The enemies are out of sight. Here is a man who can cry—would that *we* could honestly take up the words, and use them of ourselves!—'My heart is fixed, O God! my heart is fixed!' He calls for music, for praise, for adoration! He can hardly find words to express what

he means, and feels. He will awake the morn; he will praise; he will sing; he will make the people around, yea, he will make *the Nations*, to hear the sound of his song. God's mercy and God's truth—these are his themes. Above the Earth, and above the Heavens, too,—let God be exalted! Psalm cviii.

These warm words are well worthy to be repeated, and it was no vain boast of the writer that even 'the nations' should hear them, as we do now. But how can this flight be sustained? Shall the wings of Piety and of Poetry suffice for the flight to continue at so great a height? Well, again, not seeking anything of his own, he finds what he requires in a Psalm (Ps. lx.) already used; and again, disregarding the opening verses and their origin, he seizes on the later portion to express his feelings. 'God's Beloved!'—the Beloved People whom God has chosen—*their* deliverance is in question. The thought of enemies comes before him, the very foes who have been pressing hard; yet from the height of his holy song he looks down upon them, and sees them struggling far below! God is speaking: God is claiming as His own the descendants of 'the fathers'; God is leading on the conflict; God is rejoicing in the victory! And, hearing it, how the Psalmist gains courage! He cannot fear. Defeat is impossible. Difficulty is gone. The Almighty conquers all. And *He* leads Israel now, as ever. He will give help from trouble. He will make the foes our footstool. The Second Part.

So, without a doubt or fear, in one unbroken song,

Psalm cviii.

he triumphs even before the battle begins. And he has found already to his hand the very song of thanksgiving and trust which expresses all that is in his soul!

PSALM CIX

1. Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise;
2. For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue.
3. They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause.
4. For my love they are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer.
5. And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love.
6. Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand.
7. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin.
8. Let his days be few; and let another take his office.
9. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.
10. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places.
11. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the strangers spoil his labour.
12. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children.
13. Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out.
14. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out.
15. Let them be before the Lord continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth.
16. Because that he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart.
17. As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him.
18. As he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones
19. Let it be unto him as the garment which covereth him, and for a girdle wherewith he is girded continually.
20. Let this be the reward of mine adversaries from the Lord, and of them that speak evil against my soul.

21. But do thou for me, O God the Lord, for thy name's sake : because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me.
22. For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me.
23. I am gone like the shadow when it declineth : I am tossed up and down as the locust.
24. My knees are weak through fasting ; and my flesh faileth of fatness.
25. I became also a reproach unto them : when they looked upon me they shaked their heads.
26. Help me, O Lord my God : O save me according to thy mercy :
27. That they may know that this is thy hand ; that thou, Lord, hast done it.
28. Let them curse, but bless thou : when they arise, let them be ashamed ; but let thy servant rejoice.
29. Let mine adversaries be clothed with shame, and let them cover themselves with their own confusion, as with a mantle.
30. I will greatly praise the Lord with my mouth ; yea, I will praise him among the multitude.
31. For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul.

PSALM CIX

THE SON OF PERDITION

I HAVE entitled this Psalm *The Son of Perdition*, partly to make prominent the application given to the Psalm in the New Testament (Acts i. 20), and partly to point its warning against impenitent sinners. Psalm cix.

Happily we know nothing with any certainty about its historical application. If there ever was a man for whom these words were meant, he has gone down to history without this mark upon his name.

We take refuge in the thought that the Psalm is a prophetical picture of Judas Iscariot. So says St Peter, in the presence of all the Apostles; and the Psalm has long been known in the Church as the *Psalmus Iscarioticus*, the *Iscariot Psalm*. What strengthens the case for such a view is the fact that the Psalm is the first of a group of four which are Messianic; the first setting forth Messiah in His betrayal; the *second* (cx.) in His Ascension to Heaven; the *third*, Christ's wonderful works and glory; and the *fourth*, the Heritage of Christ's people. The Iscariot Psalm.

Let us see then here the picture of a traitor, and a great sinner; whose curse spread from himself to Picture of a great Sinner.

Psalm cix. others. Wicked deceit and a lying tongue (ver. 2) begin the story, seen by the Psalmist as he stands before the 'God of his praise.' This title for God is learned from the Book of Deuteronomy (x. 21), and borrowed by the prophet Jeremiah (xvii. 14). It means that God is the object of his praise, even from what he sees of the Divine dealings in the case of hopeless sinners. The writer is divided between two things: the one is praise, which cannot be silent; and the other 'prayer' (ver. 4), which seems to be engrossing. It is the case of a soul ever looking to God, in all that it does. 'I give myself unto prayer.' *My life is one long prayer.* As St Paul puts it, this man prays 'without ceasing.' Passing from praise to prayer, and from prayer to praise, he sees the enemies of his soul gathering round in opposition: returning evil for good, and hatred for kindly feeling (vers. 3-5). One especially is leading the others, a man at whose right hand is Satan (or *Shaitan*, as it should perhaps be written) the accuser. This man, a tool in the hands of the 'Enemy and Avenger,' so confident and boastful in his evil doing, is going on, little as he thinks of it, to final judgment, and sure condemnation. This is not the less terrible that he has been in appearance a worshipper of God. Like the Pharisee in our Lord's Parable, he goes through the form of praying to God: but what is his prayer? It is itself *sin!*

Praise and Prayer.

A prayer that is only a form, is a sin. The prayer of a rebellious soul, meaning to continue its rebellion, has *become a sin!* How long shall such a man be permitted to go on? 'His days shall be few'

How long?

(ver. 8). The holy 'office' which he has been filling shall soon be handed over to another! What shall he leave to the widow and children? The curse of his life and example while he was with them; the evil heredity which was his, and is theirs, so that the woman whom he drove to despair, and the children that he led to be like himself, all remember him as the source of their undoing. The story can be read to-day in thousands of families; and it writes in letters, darker than David's, what sin and Satan do for their followers! The Psalm does not unduly darken his life and its results. These are worse than the Psalm says. Psalm cix.

But the Psalm is not done. It has yet to leave a lesson for each of us, and it does so in the closing verses, unexpectedly but most usefully (vers. 21-31). The whole force of the horror excited by the evil one and his end is used to cast the writer upon God. The emotion is too complex to find any definite articulate utterance. But, true to Nature in its extremity, its cry is, 'But do THOU for me, O Jehovah Adónai, for Thy Name's sake' (ver. 21). 'Thou, O Thou! do for me!' Undertake for me! The meaning is too full to be conveyed. And the suggestion conveyed here by the words, 'for Thy Name's sake, is remarkable when we observe that, for the first time in this Psalm God has been spoken of as Jehovah in ver. 20; here in ver. 21 the names Jehovah Adónai occur, as only four times elsewhere in the Old Testament (Pss. lxviii. 20; cxl. 7; cxli. 8; Hab. iii. 19); in vers. 26, 27, and 30, the name Jehovah again is found—'for Thy Name's sake,' hear, help, What is the Lesson for us?

Psalm cix. and save! In all difficulties, against all enemies, for every need, I only seek GOD. 'Thou! Thou!' art sufficient in all!

The Messiah.

But now we turn for a little to the Iscariot reference. It was made by St Peter, in the midst of a conference of the Apostles and early Christians when waiting for Pentecost. It was done with much emphasis, and was given as the reason for a very important step to be taken by the united body, being nothing less than the election of a new apostle to complete the list of Twelve. Although there is general agreement that they acted prematurely instead of waiting till the Holy Spirit fell on them, yet the interpretation of the Psalm as referring to Judas was received without a dissentient voice. He was recognised in two of the Psalms, in Psalm lxix. 25, and here (ver. 8). He therefore is declared to be the evil one, intended by the prophecies referred to. I have elsewhere[1] sought to trace the spiritual history of Judas, on the basis of his story as given us in the Gospels; how he joined the followers of Jesus Christ in the beginning filled with great zeal to overthrow the Romans, and establish again the throne of David; how he came gradually to find himself in opposition to the Lord's Way; and how in the bitterness of his disappointment he betrayed and delivered up the Master of whom he had once been proud. His carnal mind was full of enmity. He became for the time an Incarnation of Satan, who, as the Psalm tells us (ver. 6), 'stood at his right hand.' This then is the

[1] "He Chose Twelve." (Drummond: Stirling and London.)

evil man whom the Psalmist describes. And bitter as the words are, what dare we say of them, as we read what the Saviour said in His Prayer to the Father: 'None of them is lost, save the Son of Perdition' (John xvii. 12)? We remember how St Paul takes up the words, and referring to the Anti-Christ yet to be revealed in the Future, speaks of 'That Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition' (2 Thess. ii. 3). They are not the same: they are two men, Judas and the Anti-Christ yet to come. But of all the men in history, these two only are called by the same name, and embraced in the same description, 'Good were it for that man'—the man predicted in the Psalm, the man of the garden and of Aceldama, and the Future Anti-Christ—'if he had never been born!' Psalm cix.

'But do Thou for me. O Jehovah Adónai! for Thy Name's sake!' 'Oh save me, according to Thy tender mercy!' Jehovah 'shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul!'

PSALM CX

1. The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.
2. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.
3. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.
4. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.
5. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.
6. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.
7. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.

PSALM CX

THE KING AND PRIEST

Psalm cx.

APART from the meaning of its several verses, this Psalm is one of the most important and difficult in the collection. It has received special notice in the New Testament, no fewer than thirteen citations from its seven verses being found there, of which three, or possibly four, are from the lips of our Lord, and six in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where a great Doctrine of the Faith is largely rested upon its language. There has been much discussion too about the meaning of some portion of it, and of several inferences which have been deduced from it.

The Psalm Messianic.

That it is *Messianic*, all are agreed. The Jewish Rabbis contended for this long ago. Whether it is Messianic in the same limited sense as many other Psalms, which had a historical basis when they were written, and added a prophetic sense to some of their parts; or whether this Psalm stands almost alone, excluding all immediate, personal reference to any merely human hero, has been disputed. The evidence seems to me in favour of the latter view.

Its Author

Strange to say, we have special Divine Authority for its authorship. Our Lord committed Himself to this view in a statement which has been recorded

Psalm cx. by three Evangelists; and which, so far from being an accommodation to the views then prevalent, is one necessary to His argument and to the truth which He teaches as to His Own Divine Being. The terms in which His statement was made, as recorded, vary somewhat; but each Evangelist adds something to the testimony for the Davidic authorship and prediction. St Luke says, 'David himself saith in the Book of Psalms' (Luke xx. 42). St Matthew says, 'David in Spirit doth call Him, Lord' (xxii. 41). While St Mark, most definitely, gives it, 'David himself said by the Holy Ghost' (xii. 35). Those who are of opinion that these quotations do not attest the authorship of the Psalm, have more to contend for than their view that the Lord's knowledge was incomplete about such matters. For they imply that He made a mistake of an important character, affecting the proof of a great truth; and that this mistake was *part of the teaching* which He offered, in connection with it; and also that the Holy Spirit inspired the Evangelists to make the statement current, without any warning or indication that there was a mistake underlying it. It seems to me that these things are quite inadmissible, and that what our Lord said conveys the assertion that David *was* the author of the Psalm, and that important consequences depend upon that fact.

King and High-Priest.

Another matter of grave importance lies outside of the interpretation of the language of the Psalm. It concerns a person who is called Adónai, who is seated on a throne as King; and who is also declared to be a Priest (a High-Priest) for ever. Now of

course we cannot fail to remember that the Psalm was written during the Dispensation when the priesthood of Aaron and his descendants was ordained of God. During that Dispensation, any person who officiated as priest in Israel, not himself descended from Aaron, was directly breaking the Divine Law. We have an instance of this in the case of King Saul (1 Sam. xiii. 8-13), where the impatient king could not wait till Samuel came, but himself 'offered the burnt-offering.' His own excuse was: 'I *forced myself*, and *offered the burnt-offering*.' And Samuel's reply was, 'Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not *kept the commandment*; but *now* thy kingdom shall not continue.' It is impossible, therefore, to suppose that this Psalm could contemplate the acceptable offering to God by a Jewish High-Priest who was not 'of the sons of Levi.' This, indeed, is one of the strong arguments used in the Epistle to the Hebrews, to show that the Psalm referred to one who 'could not be a priest after the Law'; and that this is the purport of the verse which tells us that 'this man' was a priest 'after the Order of Melchizedec.'

Psalm cx.

Passing then from the discussion of the two questions which have already occupied us, let me say a few words about the structure of the Psalm, which is very interesting. It consists of two parts, the one including three declarations made by Jehovah (vers. 1-4); and the other of four actions done by the Person who is called Adónai.

The Structure of the Psalm.

Part I. begins, 'Thus saith Jehovah' (ver. 1): it continues, 'Jehovah shall send the Rod of thy

Solemn Words.

Psalm cx. strength out of Zion' (vers. 2, 3); and it closes, 'Jehovah has sworn' (ver. 4).

The solemn words with which the first verse opens (and in the Hebrew they are more solemn than as translated) are, 'Thus saith Jehovah unto my Adon, Sit Thou at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.'

The person so addressed by Jehovah is acknowledged by the Psalmist David as 'My Adon' and (ver. 5) 'Adónai.' He is King: He is enthroned on the right hand of Jehovah: and it is for a season—'till all His enemies' have been conquered and have become a 'footstool' for His feet.

The Rod and its Bearer.

The second verse is, 'Jehovah shall send the Rod of Thy strength out of Zion.' The 'Rod out of Zion' probably refers to the Rod of Moses, with which the mighty works of God were done in Egypt, and which was by God's command laid up in the Sanctuary (Num. xvii. 10; xx. 9; Heb. ix. 4).

This was the 'Rod of Strength' which was to be brought out of Zion, and before which no enemies of the Lord and of His people could stand. But behind the bearer of this Rod the people of Adónai were willingly to gather. They should present themselves as 'free-will offerings,' numerous and bright as the dewdrops of morning, gladly following in the footsteps of their King.

The Oath of Jehovah.

Then follows the Oath of Jehovah, given to Adónai. 'Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent.' Note the peculiar, the almost unparalleled, solemnity of the declaration. The Covenant-God hath taken, and hath

made known, His Oath. And there is added to this statement the assurance that 'He will not repent.' What then is so pledged, made so sure, and destined not to be recalled or changed? It is that Adónai is 'a High-Priest, for ever, after the order of Melchizedec.' The Priesthood of Him who was already enthroned; a priesthood which belonged to Him personally, not by descent; and which should continue His for ever. This is what God's oath and promise have made sure. It would have been enwrapt in total and hopeless mystery for us but for the inspired page of 'Hebrews,' where it is expounded at length as belonging to and fulfilled in Christ Jesus. Psalm cx.

He, therefore, and He only, is the Adónai of this Psalm.

This brings us to the second part of the Psalm (vers. 5-7), as to what Adónai is to be and do. And here, for the sake of connection and of clearness, we may put together all that the Psalm tells us of Adónai, though part of it has necessarily been already touched upon in dealing with Part I. Adónai Enthroned.

1. Here, then, is Adónai enthroned. There is a twofold Throne, one that of the Father, the other the Mediatorial Throne. Our Lord Himself in the Book of Revelation distinguishes between the two. 'He that overcometh shall sit with Me on My Throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father on His Throne!' (Rev. iii. 21). The parallelism of this language with that of the Psalm is very striking. And on another occasion our Lord seems to have alluded to the first verse here, when He said to the high-priest Caiaphas, 'Hereafter ye shall see the Son

Psalm cx. of Man *sitting on the Right Hand of Power*, and coming in the clouds of Heaven' (Matt. xxvi. 64).

Adónai's Kingdom.

2. The period of Adónai's Kingdom is here fixed and described. It is till 'His enemies be put under His feet.' The language is indefinite, and here again would be very mysterious but for New Testament teaching. But is not light thrown upon it by the language of the Apostle in 1 Cor. xv. 24-26, where this very verse is quoted? 'When He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power,' then 'He shall have given up the Kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all. For He (Christ) *must reign* till He hath put all enemies under His feet.' Till then Adónai reigns: when God the Father 'hath put all under His feet,' then Christ gives up the Mediatorial Throne, so that, henceforth, the Revelation of God shall not be in the Three Persons, but in the Unity of the Godhead, that 'God may be all in all.'

Adónai's Rule.

3. The third promise made to Adónai here is that He is to 'rule in the midst of His enemies.' This apparently refers to the *meantime*, to the time of struggle and conquest. It does not say 'rule *over* Thine enemies,' but 'in the midst of,' while they are opposing and resisting. It means that the Kingdom is to be for a time, yea, for a long time, troubled, opposed, divided, rebellion all round, Satan and evil men dissatisfied, and seeking to dishonour Him whom God has exalted. Still, amid all the opposition, He is to 'rule.'

Offerings to Adónai.

4. All the time of this struggle His people present themselves as 'free-will offerings,' numerous and

bright as the dewdrops from the womb of Morning. As in Ps. cxix. 108: 'Accept the free-will offerings of my mouth, O Lord.' They are to come in, spontaneous and many, beyond number. Because that is to be 'the Day of Power,' and this is how the Power of God is shown in the increasing and entire devotion of His people. **Psalm cx.**

5. The Adónai is to be a 'High Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedec.' The allusion is evidently to the offering on the Cross, in which Messiah was at once Priest and Lamb, the Fulfilment of all the Offerings of the Law. First, He was the Passover, 'The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.' Then, He was Burnt-Offering, Meat-Offering, Peace-Offering, Sin-Offering, Trespass-Offering, All in One, as set forth in Isa. liii. And then, ascended into Heaven, He is an High Priest, to plead and intercede for His own, in the manner set forth in John xvii. This Priesthood was received direct from the Hand of the Father; was consummated on the Cross; is continued in Heaven; is solitary, without any other; and is 'for ever.' It is 'after the order of Melchizedec'; it is in the Person of the King, and He is 'the King of Righteousness' and 'Prince of Peace.' Adónai as High Priest.

6. The next thing told us of Adónai is that He is to 'strike down kings in the Day of His wrath.' It seems strange that any doubt should rest on the interpretation of this verse. Many have referred it to Jehovah. But we have in the Psalm two persons named, Jehovah and Adónai. We have two places assigned to these in verse 1: Adónai on the right Adónai as a Conquering King.

Psalm cx. Hand, and Jehovah who has placed Him there. In this fifth verse we have Adónai mentioned by name, and again He is at the right Hand. Why, then, should we overturn the names and places and insist on the Adónai here being Jehovah, who has changed places and also names? It is true that the verse has become a prayer instead of a narrative, like the verses before it. But surely the prayer is addressed to Jehovah, and the meaning should run, 'Adónai at Thy right Hand, O Jehovah, shall strike through kings in the Day of His wrath.' The kings represent the nations over which they rule, and which resist and oppose the Messiah. They shall one by one be overthrown. Nor let any one shrink from the thought of the Anger of Messiah, remembering that we read (Rev. vi. 16) of 'the wrath of the Lamb.'

Adónai as a Judge.

7. The next thing said of Adónai is the wonderful anticipation of the truth that Jesus Christ is to be the 'Judge of Quick and Dead.' 'He shall judge among the nations!' He who sitteth 'on the great White Throne, from whose face the Earth and Heaven fled away,' is none other than the Adónai of this Psalm—'The Messiah, long promised and expected, the Son of God.'

Adónai and the Living Waters.

8. The last thing told us of Adónai is that 'He shall drink of the brook in the way, therefore shall He lift up His head.' It is not easy to see why this characteristic should find a place, and that the closing place of all. The 'Brook in the Way,' I would venture to identify as the 'River of God's Pleasure' (Ps. xxxvi. 8); the Water of Life, 'clear

as crystal,' whose source is the Throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. xxii. 1). That River which the Apostle saw in Heaven is the same which has long been the joy and refreshment of life, the 'streams making glad the city of our God.' The people of God drink from it as they go, and as they struggle. And from the same source of Divine supply and strength the Messiah draws—He who was 'filled with the Spirit,' whose works were done in the strength of the Father, whose very words were not spoken 'from Himself,' who said, 'Of Mine Own Self I do nothing' (John viii. 28). 'He drinks of that Brook' of living water; and hence He is lifted up on high for ever! It is a reminder here that Messiah, becoming Incarnate, 'emptied Himself of His glory,' and became subject to human needs. He is to be not only the Son of God, but also the Son of Man. He has not taken on Him our nature merely that in some future age He might put it off again. In the language of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, He has become God and Man, 'in one Person, for ever.' Just as He is a *High Priest* for ever, so He is *Man* for ever. All the past humiliation is over and done with, but its fruits remain, the purchase of the sacrifice, one of which is our unspeakable nearness to Him who is our Brother of the Flesh, and also God the Adorable. And this is recalled to our wondering and thankful hearts in the closing words of the Psalm—'He did drink of the brook in the way, and therefore His head is lifted up on high.'

Psalm cx.

PSALM CXI

1. Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation.
2. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.
3. His work is honourable and glorious: and his righteousness endureth for ever.
4. He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of compassion.
5. He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant.
6. He hath shewed his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen.
7. The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure.
8. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness.
9. He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.
10. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.

PSALM CXI

GOD'S MIGHTY WORKS

Psalm cxi.

Three Peculiarities.

THERE are three things connected with this Psalm which must be taken into account if we would understand it fully. It is an alphabetical Psalm, each line in Hebrew beginning with a letter of the alphabet in order; the first eight verses having two lines each, and the last two verses three lines each. In these respects it is followed exactly by the next Psalm, the 112th.

The second peculiarity is that it is the beginning of a group of seven Hallelu-jah Psalms (with one exception, which will be noted in its place), ending with the 117th.

And the third is that with the next Psalm it is an introduction to the group of Psalms which were all sung by the Jews at the Passover and other great feasts. The two prefatory Psalms were *not* so sung, but they are in the Psalter specially connected with, and lead up to, the five which were.

Obviously, therefore, this group of Psalms are of a special character, and have an underlying line either of sentiment or of historical association, which must have been known to and valued by

Psalm cxi.

those who placed them in the order in which they stand.

The Works of God.

If we can venture to divide the Psalm into parts, we should say that the first subject is the mighty works of God, especially those done for His people Israel, and the second is the great redemption in connection with which these works were done. Seven times are God's works referred to, each time bringing out something to add to the Psalmist's praise and wonder. He sings with his 'whole heart,' a single-minded and simple-hearted man (ver. 1); and he means his Psalm to be used in some private gathering of the faithful, and also in the 'congregation,' possibly the family gatherings for the Passover and the more public congregation. Jehovah's works are 'great,' and 'sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.' They are well worth studying; they form a 'science' of their own. He says (ver. 3) God's 'work is honourable and glorious,' the whole history of Israel testifies to His honour, and gives Him glory. And then there follows a word which becomes a chorus for the next Psalm, and is used there twice in that sense, '*His righteousness endureth for ever.*' It is a good chorus, well worthy of such use; worthy to be so employed, as possibly it may be, in Heaven itself. He says again (ver. 4) that 'God's wonderful works have been made a memorial,' alluding no doubt to the Passover memorial of the great miracle of Exodus; and that one of the great lessons of that memorial is the 'graciousness and compassion of Jehovah' to His own shown in the olden days of marvel. He says that God 'hath

given meat unto them that fear Him, and will ever be mindful of His Covenant' (ver. 5), recalling thereby the miracle of the manna, of which the Passover also contained a symbol. He says that God 'by His works hath shown forth His power to give them the heritage of the heathen' (ver. 6), as He did for them in the Holy Land. He says (ver. 7) that God's 'works are verity and judgment, and all His commandments sure;' not merely that the works are *true* and will stand in judgment, but that the essence of truth and the righteousness of the Judge is in them! Psalm cxi.

And having so opened his heart about the works of God, the Psalmist passes on to sing of the Redemption in connection with which they are done. 'Redemption for His people' by an 'everlasting covenant,' and in sight thereof he bursts into a new song, 'Holy and Reverend is His Name' (ver. 9). 'Holy and Reverend' in A. and R.V.; 'holy and terrible' renders one critic; 'holy and awful,' others. The Holiness of God is seen in Redemption as nowhere else. The awfulness of His Name is also written there, written nowhere more plainly than on the Cross. Methinks, over the title which Pilate wrote, we may see in the spirit written there, 'Holy and awful is the Name of God!' Redemption.

The Psalmist closes by telling us a secret, or rather two secrets, in a single verse. 'The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God' (ver. 10). Not till we fear Jehovah does wisdom begin in us; the moment of first fearing God truly is its birth. That is secret No. 1. And the second is like unto it, and hardly The Secret of Wisdom.

Psalm cxi.

less important: 'Good understanding,' or 'good success,' or the way to it, through wisdom, is by 'doing.' A holy life is the way of wisdom, and there is no other. That is secret No. 2. And what can we say but to add the Hallelu-Jah with which the Psalm began!

PSALM CXII

1. Praise ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.
2. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed.
3. Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness endureth for ever.
4. Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.
5. A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion.
6. Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.
7. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.
8. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until he see his desire upon his enemies.
9. He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour.
10. The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish.

PSALM CXII

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO FEAR GOD

Psalm cxii.

THIS Psalm has a close connection with that which immediately precedes it. It is the second half of the preface to the '*Hallel Psalms*' which immediately follow. It is also an alphabetical Psalm, with twenty-two lines. It has been divided into ten verses (like Psalm cxi.), and like it the first eight verses represent two lines and two letters, while the last two represent three lines and three letters. It has also another likeness, which will appear as we proceed.

The Two Divisions.

The Psalm may be conveniently divided into the description of a believer, and the blessings which attend him, though it must be confessed that this seems to have been without any special intention on the part of the writer. It is inwoven rather in the texture of the Psalm.

What is said of the Believer.

Let us note then what we find scattered through the Psalm as to the character of the Believer. (1) 'He feareth Jehovah'—not with the slavish fear of the man who expects punishment, and knows that he deserves it, though something of this no doubt dwells in the background. It is the awful power, grandeur, and glory of God, wedded to His Holiness,

and His hatred of sin, which lead to the subdued reverential '*fear*,' with which a true servant of God regards Him. It is with veiled faces and with hushed voices that even the angels sing 'Holy, Holy, Holy.' (2) 'He delighteth greatly in God's commandments' (ver. 1). This is a remarkable saying of a pious Jew. It is not the Word generally which is referred to, but the commandments of Sinai. And we are asked to take home the thought that the true servant of God may so understand Him, and His character, as to 'rejoice greatly' at the Law which requires men to become like Him. The thought is, that the love of Holiness shows the Commandment to be holy, a dear thing to the soul! (3) He is 'upright' (ver. 4), that is straightforward, without deceit; he is 'gracious, and merciful, and righteous' (ver. 4). What a collection of fine qualities, strength and softness combined, the strength of the rock and the softness of silk! 'Gracious'—for he too gives out of the grace to which he himself owes so much. (4) He brings all this into practice, it is not only fine sentiment. It comes even (strange to say) into the region of money. 'He dealeth graciously and *lendeth*' (ver. 5); he 'hath given to the needy' (ver. 9), and hath 'dispersed' his own means to those who have little or none. These are four leading characteristics of the man who is shown as a servant of God. Psalm cxii.

We must look now at the second division of the Psalm, selecting some of the things which it tells us of the blessedness of the man who has been described. We must remember how God promises The Blessings which attend such a Man.

Psalm cxii.

a temporal blessing to the obedient son or daughter; for the Psalm follows in the same spirit though not in the same words. (1) There is a blessing on *the children* of God's servants — 'His seed shall be mighty,' 'the generation of the upright shall be blessed' (ver. 2). Of course we must take many things into account in such a matter; God has a wide view; many laws come into play; and what we see is the result of all these. But, thank God! we still see this assurance carried out before our eyes: the children of the righteous are blessed of God. Early influences of a holy home, and of a parent's prayers, and teachings, the force of example, and the blessed memories of child life, do in countless cases bless the generation to come, even to the 'third and fourth generation.' 'Wealth and riches are in his house' (ver. 3). *That* is a blessing which is now not so common as in the Psalmist's time, but there are others which make up for it. And there is one thing certain, that the poverty which comes from drink and gambling is very rarely found in the home of the child of pious parents.

Steadfastness under Trial.

(2) The servant of God stands fast in trial. 'He shall maintain his cause in judgment. He shall never be moved. His heart is established; he shall not be afraid' (5, 6, 8). 'In the darkness there ariseth light' (ver. 4). All these words speak of the steadfastness of the servant of God. Events, changes, years, test him. He has trials, sorrows, temptations, disasters, like other men. But his faith holds, as 'an anchor of the soul.' The light *of* God shines upon him, yea, and *in* him, in these things;

and he comes forth a conqueror. 'This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith.' Psalm cxii.

(3) One more, and the most striking, of the blessings which follow the servant of God remains. Twice over it is set down in the Psalm, in verse 3 and verse 9. 'His righteousness endureth for ever.' The same words recur—in the one case connected with worldly prosperity; in the other, with his relations to the poor around him. The meaning of the words is that his righteousness is tested in this and other experiences, and it stands the test. Nay, it means more. It extends much further. How much more the Psalmist meant we know not, and do not attempt to guess. But we know what the Spirit which was in him intended to convey to those who could understand. That goes very far. An Enduring Righteousness.

And what must not be overlooked is that these very words, twice repeated here, are taken from the preceding Psalm. This borrowing of a phrase is one of the bonds which bind the two Psalms together. And how surprised we are to find that in the previous Psalm they are said of Jehovah! They are part of the wonderful description there given of His character. 'His righteousness endureth for ever' (Ps. cxi. 3). Here they are said of God's servant. The meaning is, that he has become partaker of the character of God. The holiness of God is beginning to supersede the old character of the man! Here is New Testament truth anticipated indeed. 'Christ is formed in you!' 'Old things have passed away: all things have become new: and all things are of God.' 'That Christ may dwell 'Christ in You.'

Psalm cxii.

in your hearts by faith, that ye . . . may be filled with all the fulness of God' (Eph. iii. 17, 19). It is true that the righteousness of God's servants 'endureth for ever.' And this word becomes like a chorus to the Psalmist's song, twice repeated as the blessing of the man who 'feareth the Lord, and rejoiceth greatly in His commandments.'

The Wicked.

One more word. It is an awful one. But God never softens the truth because of our sentiment. The Psalmist looks abroad and sees the wicked man pass by. With these things of which he has been writing, *he* has nothing to do. He despises them, he has trampled them under his feet. But what comes? He shall 'see' it all, and 'be grieved,' and 'shall gnash his teeth.' But it is too late. 'Now is the accepted time.' 'To-day, if ye would hear His voice, harden not your hearts!'

PSALM CXIII

1. Praise ye the Lord. Praise, O ye servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord.
2. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and for evermore.
3. From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the Lord's name is to be praised.
4. The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.
5. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high,
6. Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!
7. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;
8. That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.
9. He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the Lord.

PSALM CXIII

THE GREATNESS OF JEHOVAH

Psalm cxiii.

THIS Psalm is the first of 'The Hallel'—sometimes called '*The Great Hallel*'—the six Hymns of Praise which were sung at the three great feasts of the Jews, specially at the Passover. They gain for us a special interest from the allusion to their use by the Lord and Disciples on the night of Gethsemane. We read this Psalm with the thought that the Master sang it in the Upper Chamber.

The Praise of Jah.

The first three verses are an outbreak of joyful praise given to God. They begin with Hallelu-Jah—in itself, in one word, a Psalm. Then observe the threefold repetition of the call to praise in the three verses. 'The Name of Jehovah—The Name of Jehovah—The Name of Jehovah'—which is made the more emphatic by the fact that already, in ver. 1, it has been already mentioned twice—'Jah,' 'Servants of Jehovah!' Here we have then, on this solemn feast, one of the reminders of the threefold Personality of God, so often found in the Old Testament.

All Time and Every Place.

Note that the call to praise embraces both Time and Place. 'From henceforth, even for ever! There is the Eternity of God! Whatever may be said as to the meaning of such phrases in the Old

Testament when applied to man, when applied to God they must be understood as meant to imply a life without end. And this endless praise is asked from all nations. 'From the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.' All lands and all peoples praise Jehovah! the One living and true God! Thus we have everlasting and universal praise. Such is the theology of this Psalmist; and he is teaching it to the whole congregation. Nay, it is for the family also, for the father, the mother, and the children, if, as we hope, they also gathered at the Passover family feast. Psalm cxiii.

Such is the call to praise with which the Psalm opens. It proceeds to tell why this should be done. The greatness of Jehovah is a theme of which these Psalmists never tire, and which they never exhaust. But there are few more striking presentations of it than we find here. 'He is high above all nations.' That is much, for a Jew, in those days. But there is more. 'Above the heavens is His glory' (ver. 4). It is not easy to define the meaning of these words. Perhaps there was no definite thought of it in the Psalmist's own mind. Perhaps it is merely emotional, to show that the splendour of sky and earth cannot be compared to the 'Glory' of Jehovah. Perhaps it was meant that the words which follow would do something to interpret its feeling. 'Who is like unto Jehovah Elohim, who, dwelling on High, has to humble Himself even to look upon the Heaven and the Earth?' (vers. 5, 6). It is condescension in God even to occupy Himself with the greatest works of His hands. Surely that The Greatness of Jehovah.

Psalm cxiii.

is a wonderful thought for the Psalmist to have reached! For it is *real*, and not a mere word! And how few of us have taken it in, and carry it with us in our daily life! Perhaps we can convey it in our modern way by alluding to the ever wonderful facts of science, that He who made the Universe has made the eye of a fly to bear as truly the marks of His Wisdom and Omnipotence as the place and movements of a star! All created things, except man, are so small in the sight of God that there is hardly any difference between them, as of less or more. The distinctions between man and man are nothing except as to those who are 'in Christ' and those who are not. At great distances objects seem close to each other, close as grains of sand, and the distance between the greatness of God and His works is ineffable. He 'humbles Himself' even to look at the greatest of them. But—it is this God who so cares for us; nay, who loves us, one by one! It is this God whom I may love and worship and adore, and who loves to see that I do so!

God's Love and Pity.

These thoughts are pointed and brought home by what follows in the Psalm. From the great works and glory of Jehovah, it passes on to the 'poor' and the 'needy.' God has been seeking for these; and He finds the one in the 'dust,' and the other on the 'dunghill.' Having found them, He makes them 'princes of the people.' The words are quoted in substance from Hannah's song (1 Sam. ii. 8), and suggest the case of Samuel himself, and possibly of David, the shepherd boy. Of course *we* know of farther references in the words. God Incarnate

'emptied Himself' of all glory, and took upon Him 'the form of a servant.' Men asked, 'Is not this the carpenter?' And the servants of God now found among the poorest and most despised are made by Him 'kings and priests.' So wonderful is the unity of Scripture. Psalm cxiii.

The Children.

And when the Psalmist goes on to say that the great Jehovah concerns Himself about the family circle; about 'the barren woman'; about the 'joyful mother of children'—nay, of '*the* children,' as if it were *these* now around the table, present and seen—we think first, no doubt, of Hannah again and the young Samuel, but we think also of the children's Friend, who said, 'Suffer these little ones to come unto Me!' We think of the Christian home, where God Himself is the Father. We think of the Word which called the Song of the children in the Temple 'perfect praise.' And we think of the Lord Himself joining in this first Psalm of the Hallel, praising the Father's Name, and rejoicing over God's care for 'the mother' and 'the children.'

PSALM CXIV

1. When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language;
2. Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion.
3. The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back.
4. The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs.
5. What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?
6. Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs?
7. Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob;
8. Which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters.

PSALM CXIV

GOD'S MERCIES IN THE WILDERNESS

THIS is the second Psalm of the 'Hallel,' sung before drinking the second cup at the Passover. The Hallelu-Jah, which closes the preceding Psalm, should probably stand at the beginning of this, as it does in the Septuagint. As that Psalm was an outburst of praise in sight of the Majesty of Jehovah, so this is a poetical picture, short, intense, and vivid, of what He did for Israel in the Desert. There is a music in the words, and even in the thoughts. Strangely enough it is not the Covenant Name of God that is given here, but simply *Adon*, the Lord or Master; and that name is not mentioned till ver. 7, and not repeated. In all the other verses it is only 'His' (ver. 2). It will be observed also that the Psalm is written from the point of view of one who lived long after the event. This is made manifest in at least two of the allusions.

Psalm cxiv.

'When Israel went out of Egypt, the House of Jacob from a people of strange language'—such is the abrupt opening, almost every word of which is significant. *Israel* is the Name of Promise; the House of Jacob, the old Name of Infirmity. Israel

The Exodus.

Psalm cxiv.

was the nation; the House of Jacob, the family just becoming a nation. 'Went out' (not came out), in view of the great people and country left behind. The 'people of a strange language,' not strange to those who were saying Farewell, for they had heard it for 400 years; but strange to their descendants, the Jews of the Psalmist's day, probably in allusion to that picture-language which continues till to-day more or less a puzzle.

They were 'His.'

In that Day of Deliverance and Exodus 'Judah was His Sanctuary: Israel His Dominion' (ver. 2). It is difficult to see what is meant by the former statement. Most of the Commentators look at it and pass by. In what sense could it be said that their God's 'Sanctuary' was the land of Judah (for it is the land that the Hebrew points to)? It is true Judah led the van in the march across the Desert, probably as the strongest and most important tribe, inheriting the Blessing of Jacob—'Judah! thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise' (Gen. xlix. 8); as expressed still earlier in the name given him by Mother Leah, 'I will *praise the Lord:* therefore she called his name *Judah*' (xxix. 35). But something more is needed to explain the words of our Psalm; and what can it be but the thought of what Judah came to be from the time of David? The Poet-Psalmist sees the flower before the bud has begun to form. At that time referred to, only Israel acknowledged and worshipped the true God. Israel, of all the earth, was His sole Dominion.

God's Glory.

But what a wonderful manifestation of God's

power the Desert saw! 'The sea saw and fled' —that was the beginning—'Jordan was driven back'—that was the end. 'The mountains skipped like rams; the little hills like lambs' (ver. 4). It is a bold poetical picture, taking rise, no doubt, in the earthquake which shook Mount Sinai at the giving of the Law (Exod. xix. 18). 'And the whole mount quaked greatly.' Then, with one of the most daring apostrophes in poetry, the Psalm continues: 'What aileth thee, O thou sea, that thou fleest? thou Jordan, that thou turnest back?' (ver. 5). And he answers his own question, as with the sound of a trumpet, when he resumes: 'Tremble!' (tremble again with another earthquake!), 'O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob!' And then, with reference to the double miracle at Horeb and at Kadesh, with forty years between them, when the water fell from the rock that the thirsty people might drink, this Passover Psalm suddenly comes to an end. And the 'second cup' at the table is drank in commemoration of the great doings of the Lord to His Israel in the days gone by!

Psalm cxiv.

PSALM CXV

1. Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.
2. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?
3. But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.
4. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.
5. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not:
6. They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not:
7. They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.
8. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.
9. O Israel, trust thou in the Lord: he is their help and their shield.
10. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield.
11. Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield.
12. The Lord hath been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron.
13. He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great.
14. The Lord shall increase you more and more, you and your children.
15. Ye are blessed of the Lord which made heaven and earth.
16. The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.
17. The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence.
18. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the Lord.

PSALM CXV

THE TRUE GOD

We must still remember that this Psalm is part of the 'Hallel,' and must think of it as sung at the Passover and other great feasts. Especially we must think of the Master and the Twelve Disciples singing it and the following Psalms of the group after the fourth cup of the Passover on the evening of Gethsemane. Psalm CXV.

The first note of the Psalm is that there is no glory due to us, but all glory is due to the Name of Jehovah. The remembrance of our own unworthiness is always good and wise, but at no time so much so as at our high Communion services when we get near to God Himself. Along with this brokenness of spirit goes, and should go always, an awful sense of the ineffable glory of God, of His loving-kindness, and of His truth. But in the ear of the Psalmist, as he wrote, the heathen were jeering at God because of the troubles and defeat which had come upon Israel. Such scoffs had come home to the heart of the Psalmist, but instead of casting him down, had only sent him to God to tell the story and to find comfort. The Glory.

He finds much of this comfort in the thought of God's glory compared with the 'idols.' While they

Psalm cxv. And the Shame.

scoff, 'God is in the heavens,' silent perhaps, but not idle. '*He hath been doing whatever He pleased*' (ver. 3). All the things which happen on earth to us or to others are subject to His rule and His good pleasure. That is the blessed thought of what we call Providence. It is striking to find it so fully recognised by an old Jewish writer; we can see how sweet it made a Passover song. But while Jehovah has been so dwelling, and so worthy, what of the 'idols' which the heathen worship? The answer to this in the Psalm is one of the very few passages in Scripture where ridicule is used, but five verses here are full of it, and of scorn for all who trust in such things. The image, made of silver and of gold to look like a man or a woman, with mouths which do not open, and eyes which do not see, and ears which do not hear, and noses which do not smell, and hands which do not handle, and feet which do not walk, and throats which do not breathe—these are the things, the 'nothings,' as they are called elsewhere, which bring shame to the men who make and who trust in them. The passage which comes nearest to this in its picture of the same thing is perhaps the strange Chaldee verse which is found in the midst of the Hebrew by Jeremiah, without explanation (chap. x. 11). 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.' And the scorn of the Psalm is paralleled by Isaiah (chap. xlvi. 1, 2), when he describes the idols (Bel and Nebo) as carried by cattle, making a load for carriages, and themselves taken into captivity, unable to deliver themselves.

From this scornful glance at heathen idols, the heart of the Psalmist turns to Jehovah. 'O Israel, trust thou in the Lord! O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord! Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord!' (vers. 9-11). Leaving for the moment the assurance of help to those who do so, let us pause over the threefold cry: Israel as a nation, Aaron's house, the priests, and then all the godly in Israel (including perhaps proselytes from other nations), '*Ye that fear the Lord.*' It is remarkable, for the same threefold division is repeated in so many words in vers. 12, 13; and it also *verbatim* in Ps. cxviii., the last of the Hallel Hymns; and once again in Ps. cxxv. 19, 20 (with a slight addition). It had therefore become a well-known phrase or chant, a favourite quotation with which men burst into song. And probably it took its rise from a psalmist who was himself a priest 'of the house of Aaron,' and who was also a spiritual man who saw that trusting and fearing the Lord was the surest way to blessing.

Psalm cxv. But our God!

Then note that each of the three classes who are thus denoted are to receive the same blessing. 'Jehovah is their help and their shield' (vers. 9-11). Again, as including something more, but not specifying what it is (vers. 12, 13), 'He will *bless* them.' The former seems to have in view conflict and trouble, in which Jehovah will give His powerful help, strengthening their arms, and will defend them, as a shield held over their heads. The latter refers rather to daily life and real communion with God therein. In the other Psalm, where the chorus-like

The One Great Blessing.

Psalm cxv.

song is used, it is indicated that 'the mercy of God which endureth for ever,' is their portion and possession.

A Closing Blessing.

And so the Psalm is ready to close. 'You and your children' are to receive blessing—Jehovah will not forget 'us'—meet words for the Passover Supper. 'More and more,' after we have come to the Lord, trusting in Him. Again, lift up your eyes to the heavens, 'these, even the heavens, are Jehovah's'; and He, out of His fulness and riches, 'hath given the earth to the children of men.' 'The dead' (ah, yes; how many to be remembered now!) 'they praise not Jehovah.' Here their songs are no more heard, they have 'gone down to silence.' But we, the living—the living 'WILL BLESS JAH from this time forth and for evermore!'

PSALM CXVI

1. I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.
2. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.
3. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow.
4. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.
5. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.
6. The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me.
7. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.
8. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.
9. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.
10. I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted:
11. I said in my haste, All men are liars.
12. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?
13. I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.
14. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people.
15. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.
16. O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.
17. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord.
18. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people,
19. In the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the Lord.

PSALM CXVI

A THANK-OFFERING

Psalm cxvi.

Again we come to a Psalm which has been precious to the Church of Christ, and lives in the memories of many. It has been attributed by old Jewish tradition to King Hezekiah as its author, and one able Commentator (Bishop Kay) has brought twelve parallels from the story of Hezekiah in Isaiah to verses of the Psalm. But is it not just as probable that Hezekiah remembered the Psalm as that the Psalmist remembered the king? It has been long used at the service called 'the churching of women,' to which some of its verses have made it specially appropriate. It has been divided into two portions, the first (1-10) being the utterance of thanksgiving, and the second (11-19) vows for the future. At all events these are the two marked divisions of this very precious Psalm.

Loving Gratitude.

With somewhat uncommon words the Psalm opens, conveying in a simple and natural manner the real feelings of the writer's heart. 'I love Jehovah because He hath heard my voice' (ver. 1). 'O Thou that hearest prayer' (says another Psalm), 'to Thee shall all flesh come' (Ps. lxv. 2). But *this* is more personal; it means something more than readiness to pray; it means that the heart has been won by God's goodness to it. And he has also

learned therein the lesson of prayer, for he 'will call upon God so long as he lives.' We have a detail of the trouble. He was sick unto Death, and knows now what 'the sorrows of Death' are. He was subject to 'pains of Hell.' He 'found' trouble and sorrow. Out of all these, he cried. Never too weak, never too sorely suffering, to pray! 'O Jehovah, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul!' (ver. 4). The Hebrew word is not distinctive (*nephesh*), having many meanings; but the Greek gives it *psuche*, the same word as the Lord used in Gethsemane, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death'; and it is not unlikely that He who had sung this Psalm an hour before, was remembering it and using its language in His Agony. Psalm cxvi.

And the Psalmist is overcome by the grace and mercy of the Lord. 'Return,' he says, to that soul which was almost departing, 'return unto thy rest, O my soul, for Jehovah hath dealt bountifully with thee!' (ver. 7). He had been 'delivered,' 'loosed as a captive'; his 'soul from death, his eyes from tears, and his feet from falling.' Such is the deep heart gratitude which boils over into this sacred song. Most of God's people can look back to such severe illness and such deliverance. But which of us bear such gratitude and cherish such love, in return, as this good Psalmist did? 'Bless Jehovah, O my Soul!' God's Abundant Mercy.

The second portion of the Psalm covers something more. It begins by asking the question, 'What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?' He has said already, 'I will walk before Jehovah in the Practical Gratitude.

Psalm cxvi.

land of the living' (ver. 9)—using the words in which Abraham's life was described by God Himself in the olden days (Gen. xviii. 1). He has also told the secret ('Oh! let us all learn it, there *is* no other, and it is enough!' '*I believed*,' *i.e.* '*I trusted*.' The blessing came because *I trusted in God*. And it will come to-day if *we* trust in God!

In Detail.

But he goes into some detail. What am I to render? How to let my gratitude have vent? His first reply is: 'I will take the Cup of Salvation.' When used as it was for centuries at the Paschal Feast, how could the application of these words to the 'Cup of Blessing' therein found, be omitted? Did not the Lord sing them, with the cup at His hand? And shall not every man who can say the two things which this Psalmist says, the two golden words, 'I love the Lord,' 'I have trusted'—shall not every such man delight to say, 'I will take the Cup!' But he will add surely this, 'I will pay my vows to the Lord now, in the presence of all His people?' (ver. 14). My vows, and *all* my vows! I will pay them 'now,' whatever I have done heretofore! And I will pay them, not as if ashamed, as a secret which friends must not know; but openly—so gratitude demands!—'in the presence of all His people!' (ver. 14). For this is a lesson which I have learned in that past trouble,—that 'precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of His saints' (ver. 15). If it had not been so, if Jehovah did not care, I had certainly died. But even my poor life was 'precious.' He would not see it perish till something more had been done, in me and for me!

Is it not a wonderful word, whether spoken by king or servant? Psalm cxvi.

It is strange that amid the Stories of Blessing through the Psalm in the History of the Church, we do not find more reference to these words. One story there is of Babylas, Bishop of Antioch, a martyr in the third century, singing them on his road to death. But this, touching as it is, is neglected or unknown in Mr Prothero's list of far less beautiful anecdotes.

'Even so, Lord,' continues the Psalmist. 'I am Thy servant—the *son of Thy handmaid.* Thou hast loosed my bonds' (ver. 16). He is no captive now. But he is a slave to Jehovah, and will be all his days. And in that moment he remembers a *mother*; and a mother who was a Handmaid of the Lord! It is not often in the Psalter that we find such a reference. Once or twice it is[1] in the same words as here; and we delight to find it. Thank God for the praying mothers, who pleaded with their children to give their hearts to the Lord! And so, again presenting his offering of thanksgiving, and again promising to 'pay his vows unto the Lord *now*, in the presence of all His people,' the Psalm ends. And can we not hear the Master's own voice sounding still a little above, and a little later than the others in the evening of that Passover Day, lingering over the notes, as He sings the words—'*In the midst of thee, O Jerusalem!* HALLELU-JAH!' Jehovah's Bond-Servant.

[1] See vol. ii. p. 260.

PSALM CXVII

1. O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people
2. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord.

PSALM CXVII

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

Psalm cxvii.

It is the shortest of all the Psalms, consisting of two verses, that is of *four lines*. But in some respects it is as striking, and full of teaching, as most of the other Psalms. It is the world-wide Flag of the Redeemer's Empire; and is boldly raised in Jerusalem, centuries before the Birth of Jesus Christ. Be it remembered, that it was one of the Psalms forming the '*Hallel*,' sung at the Feast of the Passover, and therefore sung by the Lord Jesus on the night of His Betrayal.

World-wide.

Calls to Praise.

1. Short as it is, the Psalm contains three calls to praise,—Praise — Praise — Praise — the last of which is a *Hallelu-Jah*. The reiteration, one after the other, speaks of the strong emotion under which the author labours and rejoices.

2. Here we have the Persons of the Holy Trinity, all invoked, each in His Office, and praised. Not in the consciousness of him who wrote, nor of those who in the olden time offered up this Psalm as heart-incense. But 'the Spirit which was in them did signify' what they could not yet understand. 'O praise Jehovah' (ver. 1); 'the truth of Jehovah' (ver. 2); 'praise ye Jah' (ver. 2). The Father, Lord of All the Earth: The Spirit, who teacheth

Psalm cxvii.

in all things: the Son who shall yet become incarnate. *We* see, and accept, and sing, because to us the Great Truth has been revealed.

Praise from All.

3. Those who are called and privileged to offer praise, are twice specified. They are 'all nations,' and 'all the peoples.' Two words, one of them very uncommon, and their conjunction conveys the meaning that there is to be no exception, but that all kindred and countries whom Jehovah has made ought to praise Him. This from a Jewish pen, sung in Jerusalem, at the Paschal Feast!

4. The *variety* of praise so to be offered is indicated by the use of two words in the first verse —'*Praise* Him,'—and '*Laud* Him.' It is not always, of course, that such differences in the Hebrew text are meant to carry distinct thoughts, but there is ground for thinking that this short Psalm is full of subtle meanings. Praise has many aspects, according to the blessings which it acknowledges. Countless mercies make a great Harmony in the notes of the Redeemed.

Praise for Mercy.

5. Two grounds for praise are specified (ver. 2), *Mercy* and *Truth*. Let us take them separately, as they are dealt with in the Psalm. 'His merciful kindness is great toward us.' So runs our A.V. and P.B.V. The R.V. translates 'Mercy.' Delitzsch insists on *Grace*, which brings in the thought of Redemption work. And the value of it is seen when we reach the word *great* (that is, *prevailing*), which is the word used for the rising of the Waters of the Deluge covering the dry land (Gen. vii. 24). His Grace has come, over us, all-prevailing, cover-

ing all sin, satisfying all need, hiding all our past. And what do the words 'toward us' signify here? Are they meant for Israel distinctively, and so for an argument to show other nations reason for praise? Or, do they mean simply 'us men,' who all partake of the Mercy of God? Or, do they refer to Believers, Jews or Gentiles, and to them only? The last of the three alternatives must be accepted when we read 'Grace' as the translation of the word. Psalm cxvii.

'The *Truth* of Jehovah' is the other ground for praise specified in the Psalm. 'Grace and Truth' is not an uncommon phrase. The Beloved Apostle has given it a new currency, and a special value. It brings our thoughts at once into the sphere of Redemption. It specially affirms the relation of both things to Christ. It shows them as within His Mission. It suggests their possible contrariety, but declares their reconciliation. Never was such mercy as the Grace which is 'poured out' on men, and never such truth as is shown in the Cross. 'The Righteousness of Jehovah endureth for ever.' It stands out Eternally justified by the Sacrifice of Christ! Age after age, as the world lasts, only shows more clearly the combined Grace and Truth of the Covenant Jehovah. Praise for Truth.

6. The Psalm indicates again how this result has been reached. Negatively, it has not been through the approach made by Man, either gradually or otherwise, towards goodness, and thus towards God. It has been entirely from God's side. He did not wait for a cry coming from Earth unto His ear to be reconciled. Alas! *that* would never have come. God Comes to Man.

Psalm cxvii.

This is true of the Race as a whole, and it is true of the individual sinner. No man ever came first to God. God comes to Man. He calls; He speaks; He reveals Himself; He offers; He 'provides a Lamb for the Sacrifice.' Everything from Jehovah. His Mercy, His Grace, 'towards us.' Towards all men. The Jew first: but the Gentiles also! All nations! All the peoples! 'Whosoever will, let him take the Water of Life freely.' *That* is the Gospel call. 'O praise the Lord! . . . Hallelu-Jah!'

7. We return then at the close to the one thought round which it all centres, that the Good News revealed by God was meant not for Israel only, but for all the earth. St Paul quotes the Psalm to show that this is so (Rom. xv. 11), making it one of the foundations of a great argument, and he has already (vers. 8, 9) virtually quoted the other verse of the Psalm, as to 'the truth' and 'the mercy' of God. All men, Jew and Gentile, white and black, near and far, were to hear the Glad Tidings. Did this Psalm stand alone, it would, ever and everywhere, witness that the 'God of the Jews' was the 'God of the Gentiles' also. Romans is not more distinct as to this than the Psalms. I have called the Psalm by the title, 'God so loved THE WORLD.' This is here as distinctly the message of the Old Testament, as it is of the New. The question, on what conditions and terms this was to be preached, which once so divided the Apostolic Church, is not touched in the Psalm. But the truth is here: and the Call to the Earth. And it is a strange but comforting thought

The Message of Both Testaments.

that, in days which are still future, Jews are to be the Missionaries of making known to all the Gospel of God. 'They shall declare My glory among the Gentiles.' When they do so, one of the Psalms which shall surely be sung at their meetings is Psalm cxvii. Psalm cxvii.

PSALM CXVIII

1. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever.
2. Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth for ever.
3. Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endureth for ever.
4. Let them now that fear the Lord say, that his mercy endureth for ever.
5. I called upon the Lord in distress: the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place.
6. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?
7. The Lord taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me.
8. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.
9. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.
10. All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them.
11. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them.
12. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the Lord I will destroy them.
13. Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the Lord helped me.
14. The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.
15. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly.
16. The right hand of the Lord is exalted: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly.
17. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.
18. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.
19. Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord:
20. This gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter.
21. I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.

22. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.
23. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.
24. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.
25. Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.
26. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord.
27. God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.
28. Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee.
29. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

PSALM CXVIII

MESSIAH'S SONG OF TRUST

Psalm cxviii.

AGAIN we come to a notable Psalm, the last of the Hallel; and again we find our Lord so identified with some of its very words that we have given it the title which appears above.

It has entered largely into the History of the Church. A whole string of references follow it in Mr Prothero's book. Wycliffe, on what seemed his deathbed, woke up to hope, crying, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord' (ver. 17). And Luther claimed this as his own very Psalm, 'nearest his heart,' 'my friend,' 'dearer to me than all the honours of the earth.'

The Psalm and our Lord.

But before and behind all such references we remember how the Lord was welcomed by the children of Jerusalem in the words of vers. 25, 26. 'Hosanna! . . . Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord.' And immediately follow words (ver. 27) which He Himself sang on that evening of Gethsemane, 'Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the Horns of the Altar.' Here too (vers. 22, 23) are verses applied by the Lord to Himself (Mark xii. 10), 'The Stone which the Builders rejected is become the Headstone of the Corner. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our

eyes.' Four times, besides this, are these verses quoted in the New Testament. And deeply interesting is the tradition that Jacob's Stone at Bethel is referred to; refused by the Builders of Solomon's Temple as a Foundation-stone; accepted by them as a Corner Headstone, to crown the Building; carried by Jeremiah to Egypt; transferred from Egypt in early days to Tara in Ireland; and now, strange fate! the Coronation-Stone in the Abbey of Westminster. But we must not be led away by traditions, however interesting, from the marvellous prayers and praises of this great Psalm. Psalm cxviii.

It has two parts, though we prefer to divide them somewhat differently from most of the critics. In vers. 1-13 we have the Psalmist's cry in trouble from which he was delivered; and in vers. 14-29 we have the utterance of his humble and believing praise. All Israel is called on to praise the Lord; and we meet here again for the third time the strange division into three portions: the nation, Israel; the priestly house of Aaron; and the godly men who fear the Lord, including proselytes from other nations. And the chorus-like line is added in each case, 'For His mercy endureth for ever!' In Trouble and in Praise.

But the Psalmist's heart is too full to rest there. There is a *fourth* division of Israel which he cannot allow to be added here in silence. It is *himself*. His personal gratitude cannot be shared by others. '*I* was in distress, *I* called, and Jehovah answered *me*; Jehovah is on *my* side, the Lord taketh *my* part; all nations compassed *me* about; the enemy thrust sore at *me* that *I* might fall, but Jehovah

Psalm cxviii.

helped *me*. Jehovah is *my* strength and song, and is become *my* salvation' (vers. 5-14). Eleven times does the personal element come to the front: but it is not the large *I* of vanity and self-consciousness: it is the broken heart, the *I* that is in the dust! What makes the wonder is, that Jehovah should have been so good and gracious and merciful, to one like *me!* Ah! which of us can join in the wonder and in the praise?

The Enemies.

And then the enemies were so many and so powerful, as if no one could have resisted them. Whatever the origin of the Psalm may have been, and whoever the writer, whether Solomon or Ezra or Nehemiah, yet it could be said that 'All nations' had compassed him about to destroy him; the 'princes' had shown him that he could not trust them; and that 'like bees' men had surrounded him to sting and to destroy. And one enemy out of the rest is specified, '*Thou* hast thrust sore at me that I might fall!' But here is the wonder—they had all been vanquished, and had vanished, as if the fire of thorns had scattered the bees to the wind! And Jehovah had done this, taking his part against them all.

The Names of God.

One of the features of the strong outburst of praise from his very heart is the use of the Names of God in the Psalm. No fewer than twenty-two times does the Name of *Jehovah* occur; six times the less usual name of *Jah*; twice *El*, and once *Elohim*. Thirty-one times in twenty-nine verses does he name the Name of God.

We have already touched on most of the utterances

of the Second Division of the Psalm. It rises higher and higher, this tide of praise and blessing. As in other Psalms, the Lord is called the writer's 'strength, song, and salvation.' 'The right Hand of the Lord' is exalted. The chastening was 'sore,' but the deliverance is complete. The 'great gates of Righteousness' are before him, presumably those of the Temple: and into them he will enter to give praise. It is the 'Lord's (own) gate,' into which the righteous shall enter, expecting to find the Lord there, in His House. He will praise, with the thought of the Corner-Stone, perhaps seen by him. It is the Lord's Day, the Sabbath, the 'great Day' of the Feast. God is coming to His own House. He will bless all whom He meets there. He will accept the awful Sacrifice there presented to Him. And then once more, 'Thou art my God, my God!' After all, that is for him the great thing. Without that, nothing: with that, all! For the Psalmist, and for you, and me! 'Jehovah is GOOD: for His mercy endureth for ever!' Psalm cxviii.

PSALM CXIX

ALEPH.

1. Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.
2. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.
3. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.
4. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.
5. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!
6. Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.
7. I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.
8. I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.

BETH.

9. Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.
10. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.
11. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.
12. Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes.
13. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.
14. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.
15. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.
16. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

GIMEL.

17. Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.
18. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.
19. I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.
20. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.

21. Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.
22. Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.
23. Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.
24. Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.

DALETH.

25. My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.
26. I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.
27. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.
28. My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.
29. Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.
30. I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.
31. I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame.
32. I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.

HE.

33. Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.
34. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.
35. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.
36. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.
37. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.
38. Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.
39. Turn away my reproach which I fear; for thy judgments are good.
40. Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.

VAU.

41. Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word.
42. So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.

43. And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.
44. So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever.
45. And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.
46. I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.
47. And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.
48. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.

ZAIN.

49. Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.
50. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.
51. The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.
52. I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord; and have comforted myself.
53. Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.
54. Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.
55. I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law.
56. This I had, because I kept thy precepts.

CHETH.

57. Thou art my portion, O Lord: I have said that I would keep thy words.
58. I intreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.
59. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.
60. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.
61. The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law.
62. At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.
63. I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.
64. The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.

TETH.

65. Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word.

66. Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.
67. Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.
68. Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.
69. The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.
70. Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law.
71. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.
72. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.

JOD.

73. Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.
74. They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.
75. I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.
76. Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.
77. Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight.
78. Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.
79. Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.
80. Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.

CAPH.

81. My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.
82. Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?
83. For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.
84. How many are the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?
85. The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.
86. All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.
87. They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.
88. Quicken me after thy loving-kindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.

Psalm cxix.

LAMED.

89. For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.
90. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.
91. They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.
92. Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.
93. I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.
94. I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts.
95. The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies.
96. I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

MEM.

97. O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.
98. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.
99. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.
100. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.
101. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.
102. I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.
103. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
104. Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

NUN.

105. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
106. I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.
107. I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word.
108. Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord, and teach me thy judgments.
109. My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law.
110. The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts.
111. Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.

112. I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end.

SAMECH.

113. I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.
114. Thou art my hiding-place and my shield: I hope in thy word.
115. Depart from me, ye evil-doers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.
116. Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope.
117. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.
118. Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood.
119. Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies.
120. My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.

AIN.

121. I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.
122. Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me.
123. Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.
124. Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.
125. I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.
126. It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law.
127. Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.
128. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.

PE.

129. Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.
130. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.
131. I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments.
132. Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.

133. Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.
134. Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.
135. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes.
136. Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.

TZADDI.

137. Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments.
138. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.
139. My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.
140. Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.
141. I am small and despised; yet do not I forget thy precepts.
142. Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.
143. Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights.
144. The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.

KOPH.

145. I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes.
146. I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.
147. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.
148. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.
149. Hear my voice according unto thy loving-kindness: O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment.
150. They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law.
151. Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth.
152. Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.

RESH.

153. Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law.
154. Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.

155. Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.
156. Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord: quicken me according to thy judgments.
157. Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.
158. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.
159. Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to thy loving-kindness.
160. Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.

Schin.

161. Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.
162. I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.
163. I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.
164. Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.
165. Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.
166. Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.
167. My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.
168. I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.

Tau.

169. Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord: give me understanding according to thy word.
170. Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word.
171. My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.
172. My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.
173. Let thine hand help me: for I have chosen thy precepts.
174. I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.
175. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.
176. I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

PSALM CXIX

GOD: GOD'S WORD: AND ME

Psalm cxix.

I PROPOSE to deal with this long Psalm in portions, taking two stanzas together, thus making eleven parts. It is an Alphabetical Psalm, each of the 22 stanzas of eight verses beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in order. In addition to this, each verse of the stanza begins with the letter which begins the stanza. It will be evident what time and care were spent by the Psalmist on the mere versifying of the Psalm.

I. STANZAS ALEPH AND BETH.

[ALEPH expresses the object after which the Psalmist yearns,—the perfect Keeping of God's Law.

BETH expresses the instrument through which this yearning may be satisfied,—the loving Study of God's Word.]

God's Word and its Names.

In these two stanzas we are struck at once with the various names for God's Word. These are eight in number, besides two others which can scarcely be included in the list. These names are mentioned in every stanza. And there is even an attempt to mention one of the names in every one of the 176 verses. In Psalm xix. I have explained six of these

names, but will give here the whole eight, for the convenience of the reader. Psalm cxix.

The Word occurs 42 times (23 as *Dabar*, 19 as *Imrah*); and either name may be taken to mean all Scripture then known.

The Law occurs 25 times (*Torah*). It is a general name for the Laws of God. It includes the following *five* words:—

(1) *The Commandments* (*Mitsooth*) occurs 22 times, and means the Ten Commandments of Sinai.
(2) *The Statutes* (*Hokkim*) occurs 22 times, and means special ordinances (in Leviticus 6 times of the sacrificial observances).
(3) *Precepts* (*Pikudim*) occurs 21 times, and means orders for the day.
(4) *Judgments* (*Mishpothim*), 20 times, and means judicial deliverances in special cases.
(5) *Testimonies* (*Edah* and *Eduth*), 23 times, being testimonies about God Himself.

In all, taking *The Word* as 2, there are 8 words, and they occur 175 times in the Psalm.

But there is another word—*Ways* (of God), which occurs 9 times (8 as *Derekim*, and 1 as *Orachim*), which might be included.

In 5 verses only in this Psalm (84, 90, 121, 122, 130) is there not special mention of one of the above names: and in 5 verses (16, 43, 48, 160, 168) more names than one are given.

Still more strangely, an attempt is made to give every one of the 8 names in the 8 verses of every

Psalm cxix.

stanza.[1] The attempt is not always successful, but it is generally, or very frequently so. Thus, in *Aleph*—'the law' (ver. 1); His testimonies (2); His 'ways' (3); 'Thy precepts' (4); 'Thy statutes' (5); 'Thy commandments' (6); 'Thy judgments' (7); 'Thy statutes' (8).

II. Stanzas Gimel and Daleth.

(3 and 4, vers. 17-34.)

[Gimel is a prayer that his study of the Word may be blessed to the Psalmist.

Daleth is an acknowledgment of heaviness of spirit, and a prayer for quickening.]

Authorship of the Psalm.

A few words may be said here as to the probable authorship of the Psalm. Of this, nothing is definitely known: there have been much speculation and guessing, with little result. Some have said David; but there is no 'title,' as in so many other Psalms, giving his name, and that is almost conclusive against it, as his name appears in the old titles wherever possible. Some have said Daniel —on the ground of such verses as 46, 64, 139, 164— but there are too slight foundations for such a belief. Some have said 'a young man,' from vers. 9, 99, 100, 141; some have said 'an old man,' from vers. 84-87.

Two things only seem clear. It was written by a man of leisure, in retirement, who laid down for

[1] Canon Cheyne calls attention to the statement of D. H. Müller, that this explains the eight line construction of each stanza. Vol. ii. 168 (Ed. 1904).

himself rules of rhythm and versical ornament, which imply any amount of time. And probably the author was a Levite, who could use the language of ver. 57, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord,'—which is almost literally the language of the Law (Num. xviii. 20; Deut. x. 9) about the Tribe of Levi. The one great outstanding fact about the author is—an unspeakable love and veneration for the written Word of God. Psalm cxix.

The time when the author wrote is also quite uncertain. Not so late as the Maccabees, whose circumstances there is nothing in the Psalm to suggest. There are verses which would harmonise with the times of the Monarchy better than after the Exile, but not so decisively as to compel the earlier date. And we not unwillingly concede that the days of Zechariah and Malachi may be those in which this Psalmist in deep retirement wrote his memorable words.

III. Stanzas He and Vau.

(5 and 6, vers. 33-48.)

[He expresses the Psalmist's love for God's Word, and a prayer that it may be made his guide more than ever.

Vau is a prayer that the Word may be his Support in all his worldly concerns and life.]

The Author and The Word.

I have already said that the great outstanding fact of the Psalm is the author's Love and Reverence for the Word of God. One of the reasons for our willingness to accept a late date for it is, that then our Psalmist knew and possessed practically the whole Old Testament as we know it. The only

Psalm cxix.

Book then incomplete was the Book of Psalms, of which his own contribution was to form so striking a part. The value he attached to the Old Testament was wonderful. How many times does this Psalm tell us of the author's love for his Bible, as it then was? No fewer than 29 times! Let me quote some of them, and weigh what they say. In *Beth*, ver. 14 tells us that he 'rejoiced in God's Testimonies,'—what we are told about God Himself—'as much as in all riches.' In ver. 16, 'he delights himself in God's Statutes, and will not forget His Word.' In ver. 35 he says, 'I delight in the path of Thy Commandments'; in ver. 47, 'I will delight myself in Thy Commandments, which I have loved'; in ver. 48, 'I will lift up my hands unto Thy Commandments, which I have loved!' Is it not strange, even for us, who have heard so much of 'the Law' in contrast with 'the Gospel,' and connected it in our minds with what is Awful, and even Terrible—to read of the love and delight which a dear old Jew poured out on the 'Ten Words' of Sinai? for *that* is the threefold reference of our last quotations.[1]

Three more verses must complete our proof. 'Unless Thy Law had been my delights, I should have perished in mine affliction' (ver. 92). 'O how I love Thy Law: it is my meditation *all the day!*' (ver. 97). 'How sweet are Thy words unto my taste,—yea sweeter than honey to my mouth!' (ver.

[1] Here are the 29 verses which tell us of his love for God's Word: 14, 16, 20, 35, 47, 48, 54, 70, 72, 77, 92, 97, 103, 105, 111, 113, 127, 128, 129, 130, 138, 140, 147, 159, 160, 161, 167, 172,

103). Let these suffice to rebuke us, and to make us thank God for the Psalmist and the Psalm! Psalm cxix.

IV. Stanzas Zain and Cheth.

(7 and 8, vers. 49-64.)

[Zain expresses the Psalmist's sense of the blessing he has received from God's Word in his trials.

Cheth shows the happiness of resting on the Word from day to day.]

In connection with the love of Scripture already illustrated, I wish here to ask what special parts of God's words may be supposed to have come thus home to the writer's heart? I reply:— Special Messages.

1. God's Law as given in Exodus, and the other Books of Moses—the *Torah*. For this we have seen there is special evidence. And though the 'exceeding breadth' of God's law might well overpower him, yet what a glimpse of the holiness of God and of His mercy comes to us in that Law! In the very wording of the Second Commandment (Ex. xx. 6) we read of His 'mercy unto them *that love Him* and keep His commandments.'

2. The Book of Deuteronomy may well have called forth the love of the Psalmist as he read. See such chapters as vi., vii., viii., xvi., xviii., xxx., and others. That Book with which our Lord was so familiar, and from which He drew all His weapons in reply to the devil's assaults in the Temptation, no doubt kindled the flame of gratitude and joy in the Psalmist's heart.

3. The Book of Genesis must not be forgotten, nor its marvellous testimonies to God in the early

Psalm cxix.

stories of His dealing with His people, Enoch, Noah, and afterwards Abraham and Isaac and Joseph. If these are so precious to us, what must they have been to a godly Jew like the Psalmist, who could count his descent from the men whose life stories were told!

4. In addition to these the histories of the Old Testament, Joshua and Judges, and Samuel and Kings, were already written as we have them, and what they were to a Jew can hardly be conceived by us who have no patriotic part in them. The whole prophecy of the Old Testament and much of the Psalms were in his hand—substantially our Old Testament, and it was more to him in many ways than it can be to us. Especially the promise of Messiah, so clear and unmistakable throughout it all, and in his day not yet performed! Yes, I can understand these fervent expressions of this man's heart as he read and meditated on the Word, and no doubt possessed for himself a copy of it, or of parts of it, made possibly with his own hand. And may we not well *wish for ourselves* that our love for God's Word were more *like his*?

V. Stanzas Teth and Jod.

(9 and 10, vers. 65-80.)

[Teth expresses his thankfulness for God's dealings with him in the past.

Jod is a meditative prayer for God's tender mercies in the future of his life.]

Confession of Sin.

Here I wish to call attention to the fact that there is *so little confession of sin* in the Psalm. Almost all the

other Psalms are full of that. No other hymns are comparable to them in self-abasement before God. To this day we read and shudder, as their authors confess. But that is not the character, even the tendency of this Psalm cxix. We go over its 176 verses, and in only three of them do we find any confession of sin! One of these is in the division before us (*Teth*), ver. 67: 'Before I was afflicted, *I went astray.*' In a previous verse (25), '*My soul cleaveth unto the dust.*' And more strongly in the last verse of all (176), '*I have gone astray like a lost sheep*; seek Thy servant.' Those are so few that we go back again and seek for more. And in our present division there are two which may imply confession. In (*Teth*) ver. 71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted,' and in (*Jod*) ver. 75, 'I know, O Jehovah, that Thy Judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.' But these are all, even when we search for them. They point in the use of terms to 'the sins of ignorance' in the Levitical law (Lev. v. 18), which, be it remembered, were real sins and needed atonement (see Num. xv. 28) by the Blood! Let us pause over the five verses and see what they tell us. The Psalmist could look back to a former life in which all went well outwardly, but in which God was forgotten. He humbly confesses it, and acknowledges that he needed the affliction which brought him to God. That was sent in faithfulness; God is to be praised for it. Even yet he knows what it is for his soul to 'cleave unto the dust.' To position, to power, to money, to pleasure, to time! He asks for

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'*quickening*'—for life, new life, 'life more abundant.' He is far yet from having been perfected.

Still more, his last word is as if he had been struck, as we are, with the little confession of sin in his long Psalm; the cry of conscience in the light of God must be heard ere he is done. 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant.' '*O Good Shepherd, once I was altogether lost, and Thou didst go after me, and find me in the wilderness: again, yet again, even now, I sometimes wander: again, wilt Thou seek after me? O to be on Thy shoulder, that I may go astray no more!*'

The life shown us in the Psalm, on the whole, is the life of Victory. Let no one wonder, as if such a thing could not be then! We remember Enoch, Abraham, Samuel, Daniel; let us class this Psalmist with them!

VI. Stanzas Caph and Lamed.

(11 and 12, vers. 81-86.)

[Caph shows us the Psalmist's heart fainting, but trusting in the Lord.

Lamed, that God is the immovable and unshaken Refuge of His People.]

Want and Supply.

The stanzas which we now reach are different in tone from the preceding, indeed, they are practically alone in the Psalm. The first of the two, *Caph, the hollowed hand*, is full of weakness and trouble, and the hand is held out to receive help. Each verse is a balanced statement of weakness and help, want and supply, need and confidence. 'My soul fainteth' as if losing hold, but what it longs for,

even to fainting, is 'God's salvation,' and its comfort is that it 'hopes in God's Word.' 'Mine eyes fail,' so that he cannot see, but it is for God's Word, and he is constantly '*saying, When?*' He has 'become like a bottle in the smoke,' like a *wine-skin* hung up in the tent, withered and smoke-dried, and ready to burst; but he still remembers the 'statutes' of Jehovah. He fears that he cannot live: 'How many are my days?' for he is feeble, and enemies 'persecute him continually.' They have 'dug pits for him,' made traps to catch him, proud men who despise God's law! Yea, they have 'persecuted him wrongfully,' but God's commandments and promises are faithful; help Thou me!' 'They had almost consumed me upon earth,' but his one hope was that he had not forsaken God's precepts. His life had become feeble, his lamp burning very low. Will not the Lord quicken him, give him new life, and so he will keep the testimony of God's mouth. Oh that God's love would revive him and enfold him in its keeping! Psalm cxix.

So he turns to a brighter strain. Jehovah's Word is settled and is in Heaven; His faithfulness is unceasing and everlasting; His law is precious beyond words; He would not forget the precepts which had already quickened him. In a word, *he was God's*: 'I am Thine, save me.' The wicked have been lying in wait; nothing would satisfy them but his life; but his heart was set on God and His Testimonies. He had seen 'an end of all perfection': that was not in man; no man could know the commandment in its breadth, and not see Well-founded Faith.

Psalm cxix.

how far it transcended all our efforts; but on that commandment, with its breadth and its height, his heart was set!

VII. Stanzas Mem and Nun.

(13 and 14, vers. 97-112.)

[Mem teaches the sweetness of God's Word; and Nun the guiding power of it to those who are willing to be led thereby.]

Here is a portion of the Psalm in which we may note some of its *Thanksgivings*. One fears that this is not a common feature in the Christian life. One does not find it showing largely in Christian meetings. But how often, and with what a ring of sincerity, it sounds in this Psalm!

Thanksgiving for the Word.

(1) For what he has been taught in God's Word (98, 99, 100, 105). The light which had broken over his soul; and his view of the character of God! That may be called the Supreme Discovery which has been made to the Soul of Man; and it is found only in God's Revealed Word. Apart from that Word, man's thought of God is either that of many dreadful Idol Powers who delight in punishing us; or that of a mystical Stream or Tendency, which we can never know. How 'the ancients' (ver. 100) were bound by the one thought; and how the moderns are seduced by the other! But the Psalmist has been taught by God Himself, to know Him as the God of Holiness and of Mercy; and how thankful he is for it!

For Israel's Inheritance.

(2) The next thing which fills the Psalmist with

thankfulness is the thought of Israel's Inheritance (ver. 111). Here, and ver. 57, this thought came home to the pious Jew. There are three Heritages which are said to be his: the Land of the Heathen (Ps. cxxxvi. 21, 22), 'the land flowing with milk and honey'; God Himself, as in ver. 57, and in the olden law; and then God's Testimonies as here (ver. 111). The *first* is the outward possession, 'a hundred-fold' more than they had at the first, 'with persecutions'; the second, the illimitable and endless possession of the Love and Favour of Jehovah; and the third, in the meantime, the exclusive possession of the Revelation of God. Then, be it remembered, there is a corresponding truth which completes the other privileges, 'Israel is God's Heritage' (1 Pet. v. 3). (So, Deut. xxxii. 9; 1 Sam. x. 1; Ps. xxviii. 9, xxxiii. 12; Is. xix. 25; Mic. vii. 14.) How can the Psalmist be other than thankful when he remembers all? Psalm cxix.

(3) Once more, he is specially thankful that 'God is his hiding-place and his shield' (ver. 114). Here is a twofold blessing suited to different experiences. Sometimes he hides 'in God,' where the enemy cannot find him, it being the last place in which they would look for any man! And sometimes he is found in the open, and is bound to fight, then God becomes 'his shield,' that is, stands between him and the enemy, so that nothing can reach him! Oh, is there not much *for us* to learn still from the experience of the writer of this Psalm? It is a child's prayer that I am about to quote; but is it not wiser than most of ours? For God's Protection.

Psalm cxix.

'Ten thousand thanks! Ten thousand thanks
For all Thy gifts to me;
Ten thousand thanks! Ten thousand thanks!
For I would grateful be!'

VIII. Stanzas Samech and Ain.

(15 and 16, vers. 113-128.)

[Samech shows us the wicked removed, but the good standing fast; and
Ain, that God is a sure protection against the devices of the wicked.]

I take here a few of *the petitions* presented by the Psalmist to God in this Psalm. A few of them only, for they are some thirty in number, he has so much to ask: he is never wearied of asking!

A Heart's Petitions.

(1) 'Let me not wander' (ver. 10). Then God *will* undertake the charge of keeping me: that is a great thing to have found out! If I ask, if I trust, I need not wander! Shall I not plead that this shall be so?

(2) 'Open mine eyes' (ver. 18). Then, as to the blind man, the Lord says *to me*, 'What wilt thou?' and it is my privilege to answer Him, 'Lord that I might receive my sight!' (Mark x. 51). What wonders, in God's law, and in God Himself, I may yet see if I only pray like the Psalmist!

(3) 'Uphold me' (ver. 116); 'Hold Thou me up' (ver. 117). In our present stanzas, the same prayer repeated; and yet with what differences. The second time it asks that He personally would hold me up: 'hold *Thou*,' by Thine own hand; it might have

been only through an agent. 'Uphold me, that I may *live*, and not be ashamed'—that is one petition, very needful and very precious. 'Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe, and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually'; that asks something more, it is that I may be set free to do something for God in observance of His law, and that I should go on doing it; the grace of *continuance* is there! Psalm cxix.

(4) 'Deal bountifully with Thy servant' (ver. 17). How much is included here. A large and bountiful measure of grace and gifts to be used in the service of God. Is it my measure? I could think of much; I could 'open my mouth wide'; but I should be in danger of 'comparing myself' with others, which is not wise, and brings me into peril. No! it is God's measure, to which I appeal: what *He* calls 'bountifully'—that must be something wonderful! Nay, the verse tells me that the Psalmist became more definite. He was 'taught' to ask even more, for in ver. 124, in one of our present stanzas, he asks that God would 'deal with him *according to Thy mercy*.'

There is the measure suggested to prayer; and of that measure, what can we say but that it is *boundless*? 'Deal bountifully with Thy servant,' O Jehovah!

Careful for nothing,
Prayerful in everything,
Thankful for anything,
Peaceful through all!'

Psalm cxix.

IX. Stanzas Pe and Tzaddi.

(17 and 18, vers. 129-144.)

[Pe expresses the Psalmist's joy at the greatness of God's Word; and

Tzaddi, his assurance that God and His Word stand fast for ever.]

We turn to *some more petitions* in the Psalm; they are so fruitful, too precious to be omitted.

Be my Surety!

1. One of the most remarkable prayers in the Old Testament is found in ver. 122, '*Be surety for* Thy servant for good.' And it must not be supposed that we are putting a meaning on these words more than they will bear. The idea of *Suretyship* was one quite familiar to the Hebrews, as we see from the Book of Proverbs. In that book there are seven passages in which our idea of the meaning is fully borne out. The same idea is elsewhere applied to God. Hezekiah prays that God would become his surety (Isa. xxxviii. 14, R.V.). Job prays that God would be surety for him (xvii. 3). So that here the prayer of the Psalmist may be taken in its full meaning. Now that meaning is the root thought of *Atonement.* It is that God would put Himself in our place, undertake our responsibility, and so bring (not *send*) Deliverance! I delight to find the thought and the prayer here in our Psalm.

A Prayer for Understanding.

2. Another prayer is found in a previous verse (ver. 27), 'Make me to understand.' With which I couple the petition in ver. 66, 'Teach me good judgment.' These are *two* things, but they are closely joined together. There is the understanding of

spiritual things. That needs to be taught. It is not taught in school or college. It is not the possession of learning or talent. Till we become new men, knowing God Himself, we do not 'understand His precepts.' St Paul labours to impress it on us (1 Cor. ii. 14), 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . *he cannot know them*, because they are spiritually judged,' R.V. Yes, we need to pray with the Psalmist—he had learned himself what he is teaching us—'Make me to *understand*.' The other petition is the complement of this, the same, and something more: 'Teach me good Judgment.' It is the power to judge what we know; to use knowledge; the art of applying it; the secret of *good sense*. Cynics have told us, with a certain measure of truth, that there is one thing which a man cannot learn: it is what they have called *common sense*. Who shall dispute its value? Can it be taught? Yes, by God. By the Spirit of God opening the eyes, enlightening the understanding, 'teaching us good judgment.' He does so, by changing our post of observation, and also by enabling us to take in a whole category of things which weigh in the scales of thought. Our whole Perspective is changed when Eternity is seen in the background! Already the Psalmist had learned where to seek for understanding and for judgment also. Psalm cxix.

3. There are many other petitions in the Psalm. It is fruitful in them. But it is impossible to deal with all; it is hardly possible even to mention them. The author asks to be 'quickened' (ver. 25); to Many Requests.

Psalm cxix.

have *life*, and more evidence of life; to be 'strengthened' (ver. 28), that he may not be spiritually either a child or an invalid; to be 'remembered' (ver. 49), knowing that if God will but remember him and his need, then everything which comes will be a blessing to him; he asks for 'a sound heart' (ver. 80)—I prefer the thought to 'the perfect heart' of the R.V., which means merely straightforward and honest — the 'sound heart' means more, for out of it are the 'issues of life'; he asks that God's 'tender mercies may come unto him' (ver. 77); what a beautiful thought, sweet, precious, strong! That God may 'look upon him' (ver. 132); that He may treat him as He does them 'that love His Name' (ver. 132); that God would 'deliver' him (ver. 134); and 'shine upon' him (ver. 135); and 'plead for him' (ver. 154); and he sums all up by one short but all-embracing petition, 'Save me!' (ver. 146). Even as he meant it, that covered every need; but what does it mean, what does it *not* mean for us who stand by the Cross, who see the Ascension of Christ, who read of Pentecost, who look out on Eternity? 'I have called upon Thee: SAVE ME!'

X. Stanzas Koph and Resh.

(19 and 20, vers. 145-160.)

[Koph—Here is an earnest cry for God's help; and Resh is a pleading to be delivered from all his foes.]

Here I propose to note very shortly some of the *pledges* which the Psalmist gives to God in this extraordinary Psalm. These pledges also, like some

of the things already noted, are very numerous; we select a few. So many pledges (over 20 in number) indicate that the author is beginning a new life; that he has come to a spiritual crisis; and is at a 'parting of the ways.' He is going to choose the road that is steep and difficult, in preference to the easy one that lies lower down. Psalm cxix.

1. In vers. 145, 146 (in our present stanzas) he pledges himself to '*keep* God's statutes and His testimonies.' Strangely enough our translators and revisers are at one in a small difference between the verses quoted. In the one he is made to say, 'I *will* keep'; in the other, 'I *shall* keep.' I fear that the difference is due to the translators only, and only in our language; but it is a difference all the same. 'I *will*,' that is my fixed purpose: 'I *shall*,' that is the sure result. But, not to dwell on this, his pledge for the future is *Obedience*. Full obedience; constant obedience; instant obedience; willing obedience; obedience to every precept. No one knew better that for this he needs constant Grace; that it is not by his own strength he can do it. But the important thing which we must not miss is, that he has fully given himself over to God for this; that his life henceforth shall be obedient to God in everything. That is what is meant by full surrender, and the Psalmist meant it. Pledged to Fidelity.

2. His next pledge to be noticed is in ver. 11: 'That I might not sin against Thee.' That is *Purity*. It is a bold thought. It is a very great aim. It ranks with Paul's aspiration, 'I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward Pledged to Purity.

Psalm cxix.

God and men alway' (Acts xxiv. 16). We must not belittle the Psalmist's words and pledges to get rid of the thought that here was an Old Testament Believer as holy (according to his light) as the great Apostle. Nor must we forget that he knows something of the highway to holiness, seeing that he 'hides God's Word in his heart, that he might not sin'!

Pledged to the Word.

3. A third pledge naturally follows the last. We find it in vers. 15, 16: 'I will *meditate* in Thy Precepts . . . I will not forget Thy Word.' Here is Bible-Reading of the right sort, the sort that adds meditation, and meditates till it is impossible to forget. We saw how much he loved the Scripture, but now he tells how that love was shown in daily study and meditation on what was so dear.

4. Again, he pledges himself to a different sort of duty. In vers. 45, 46 we have two pledges: 'I will walk at liberty'; 'I will speak of Thy testimonies . . . and will not be ashamed.' The first of these is *Liberty*; the second is *Courage*. Two most important blessings for a Christian to enter into, yet both essential for the true life of service. Liberty: for the Bondage of Sin is broken, and not a fetter remains: 'If ye abide in My Word . . . the truth shall make you *free*'! (Jno. viii. 32). And Courage: one of the most frequent prayers in the whole Psalter is that God's people should not 'be ashamed.' Only then is that prayer answered, when they have Courage to confess God everywhere.

Pledged to Prayer

5. Once more, the Psalmist's pledge is—*A Life of Prayer*. In ver. 62: 'At midnight I will rise to

give thanks to Thee.' There is many a word in Holy Scripture to describe the state of a man who is possessed by the Spirit of prayer. But in all its pages is there anything that comes more home to us than the Psalmist's promise and pledge to God that he will '*rise*, at *midnight*, to give thanks'? There is a reality about it which makes us start. Psalm cxix.

XI. Stanzas Shin and Tau.

(21 and 22, vers. 161-176.)

[Shin shows us the Psalmist's joy in the Word; and Tau is a prayer for the acceptance of his prayer.]

There is one more pledge which the Psalmist gives to God in this Psalm, with which we may fitly close our comments. In an earlier portion of it (in *Daleth*) we find a not unfitting conclusion of the whole matter. In ver. 32 we read, 'I will run the way of Thy Commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart.' He wants a larger heart, and he means to run in the Way of God. Observe that this is not in the line of Nature, it is in one sense supernatural. An enlarged heart, physically, is a diseased heart; and the last thing which can be done with it, is to run. It would bring Death. But the Psalmist knows what he means, and is making no mistake.

(1) All through the Bible, God's servants know the evil of having very small hearts. How Paul rejoiced when he found that this smallness in him was giving place to something better! 'O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged' (2 Cor. vi. 11, 13). The Psalmist longed for that! Small Hearts.

Psalm cxix.

The Need of Enlargement.

(2) Why do Believers need such a thing? In order that their hearts may *hold God*. Because almost daily they have to cry:—

'More love to Thee, O Christ,
More love to Thee!'

Because the One Commandment which embraces all the others is: '*Thou shalt love!*' And such love is required! A love to God that runs over upon everything which comes near it; and a love to man, 'Thou shalt *love* thy neighbour *as thyself*.' The great want of Christians is more love: but that means a larger heart.

Results.

(3) What is the result of an enlarged heart, that is here asked for? To enable us to 'run in the Way of God's Commandments.' Most of the Saints in Scripture have thought the highest life here to be that of those who walk with God. But the world hurries now. There is much time to be made up. Much to be done before Christ comes (in the way of Missions for example!). At all events the Psalmist felt that for him there must be haste. He must 'run.' What does it mean? A large sympathy; intense work; forgiveness to all!

Only through God.

(4) But how can we live at that rate? Does the Psalmist think that '*trying*' will do it?

Mark—

That God only can enlarge the heart.

That God's love shed abroad by the Holy Ghost does it (Rom. v. 5).

That God can cast other things out of the heart to make room.

That God can fill the emptied heart with love. Psalm cxix.
And that God can make the new heart grow ever larger, as time comes nearer to Eternity!

The Psalm in Hebrew.

Here is a poor attempt to give the English reader a notion of the construction of the Psalm in the Hebrew.

Aleph.

Are not the Blessed undefiled in the way, walking in *the Law* of Jehovah?

Always they keep His *testimonies*, and seek Him with their whole heart.

Also they do no iniquity, walking in *His Ways*.

All *Thy precepts* Thou hast commanded us to keep diligently.

Ah! that my ways were directed to keep *Thy statutes*!

Ashamed should I never be, when I have respect to Thy *Commandments*.

Again will I praise Thee with upright heart, when I shall have learned Thy righteous *judgments*;

And I will keep Thy *statutes*; forsake me not utterly!

Beth.

By what shall a young man be cleansed? By taking heed according to Thy *Word*.

Because my whole heart seeketh Thee, let me not wander from Thy *Commandments*.

Psalm cxix.

Beneath in my heart have I hid Thy *Word*, that I might not sin against Thee.

Blessed art Thou, O Jehovah! teach me Thy *statutes*;

Before all men have I declared the *judgments* of Thy mouth;

But I have also rejoiced in the way of Thy *testimonies* as much as in all riches;

Behold I will meditate in Thy *precepts* and have respect unto Thy *Ways*:

Be Thy *statutes* my delight! I will not forget Thy *Word*!

GIMEL.

Grant me of Thy bounty that I may live and keep Thy *Word*!

Give me open eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy *law*.

Guide me a wanderer on the earth, by Thy *Commandments*!

Good are Thy *judgments*; my soul longeth for them.

Graceless are the proud, and cursed they who do err from Thy *Commandments*;

Gain shall it be to me, to have kept Thy *Testimonies*;

Gloried against me did the princes; but Thy servant did meditate in Thy *statutes*:

God's *Testimonies* are my delight and my Counsellors!

PSALM CXX

1. In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me.
2. Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.
3. What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?
4. Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper.
5. Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!
6. My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace.
7. I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war.

PSALM CXX

BEARING REPROACH

Psalm cxx.

Songs of Degrees.

THIS is the first of a group of fifteen Psalms which are called in A.V. Songs of *Degrees*, and in R.V. Songs of *Ascents*. Three leading theories have been offered to account for and explain the name. One is that they were composed for the pilgrims who came from the different parts of the Holy Land up to Jerusalem for the Solemn Feasts of the Lord, and were sung by them upon the way. A second is, that they were meant for the captives in Babylon who returned to Palestine under Ezra and under Nehemiah, and were meant to celebrate their freedom. And a third is that they were sung upon the fifteen steps of the Temple at Jerusalem by worshippers at the Feasts, each step having, as it were, a Psalm of its own. There is a measure of truth in all these theories, and all of them are needed to explain the Psalms. The first of the three is the belief which was generally accepted till of late years. But it does not cover the fact that though some of them are ascribed to David as their author, and one to Solomon, the Captivity is mentioned even by name in the group. The third carries with it the love for minute resemblances and differences which mark the Jewish Rabbinic literature, and it has also the strange support of the Septuagint.

Have we not here another indication that Psalms of an earlier period were slightly modified and retouched in course of time, so as to fit later events, the arrangement into groups being in the hands possibly of Ezra, to whom we owe so much? In that case, we may still picture to ourselves the ancient times when, from all the tribes of Israel, pilgrims went up in the days of the early kings, singing as they went, to attune their hearts to the worship at Jerusalem; and then, long thereafter, how happy souls returned from the Land of Babylon to the City which they had never seen, but which was so dear to them, singing the 'Songs of Zion,' which they would sing once more when they stood upon its Holy Hill. Then, possibly, it was with reference to these fifteen Songs that the steps of the rebuilt Temple were made fifteen in number, in accord with the strain of poetry which, after all, lay deep in the Jewish heart. Psalm cxx.

It has been deemed by some commentators inexplicable that this opening Psalm contains nothing very applicable to any of the theories offered to explain the meaning of Pilgrim Songs. On the contrary, it seems to me to have a close and beautiful connection with the whole group. It is the song of the pilgrim before starting, longing for the opportunity. 'Woe is me that I dwell in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!' (ver. 5). Would that I could leave, were it only for a season! Would that the land of captivity were left behind, never to be seen again! He had known distress, and had found peace in these dark days by crying unto Jehovah. He had found it no vain thing to pray. Answers had come, The Opening Psalm.

Psalm cxx.

and he had given thanks for them. But a new trouble had fallen. Lying lips and a false tongue had beset his path, and there was no means of exposing them. He had been tempted to despair. He found no way of clearing his name and refuting the slanders which, like sharp arrows, had come against him. Coals of burning fire seemed to fall upon his head. Alas! that he was living in such a place and exposed to such wrongs. His neighbours were all against him; they loved such warfare; they would not have peace. But his soul sought for it. Now there was the prospect of going up to the Place of Worship, to the fair Hill of Zion. God had pointed the way. The Feast of the Lord was at hand, and this sorrowful soul looked to find peace there beneath the wings of Jehovah in the Holy Place. The pilgrims were about to leave, and the Sorrowful Song would turn to humble trust and to adoring praise!

PSALM CXXI

1. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.
2. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.
3. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.
4. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.
5. The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.
6. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.
7. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.
8. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

PSALM CXXI

THE LORD'S CARE OF ME

Psalm cxxi.

A Longing Cry.

THIS well-known Psalm is one of the Pilgrim, or 'gradual' Psalms. The singer, who was in trouble far away from Zion, longing for the presence and worship of Jehovah, has here the prospect of returning. 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills'—not to the hills which rise here and there over the earth, to obtain some freshness from the mountain air, or some grand uplifting view of land or sea. No; they mean the hills around Jerusalem, or hills near the Holy Land, and they are at once a guide on the further journey and a foretaste of what is to be. Hermon or Lebanon on the north, the great range of Moab on the south-east—these all are the pilgrim's joy. Above all, the Hill of Olives *becomes visible*, with its three-fold summit, and Mount Zion itself, the 'city set on an hill.' Then the heart of the pilgrim fills, and his song begins: 'I will lift up mine eyes!' The joy of the Crusading host when for the first time they saw Jerusalem in the distance is well known. Not less blessed to pilgrim, or to captive, was the sight. We will sing with him: 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from which cometh my help' (ver. 1).

Not mere Sentiment.

It was not mere sentiment that appealed to the Psalmist. It was worship. Here already was a

Sanctuary of which the Lord was Builder. For, as if to correct a possible mistake, he adds at once— 'My help cometh from Jehovah, which made heaven and earth.' Notice the individual character of the song. Though the whole company joined in singing it with uplifted voices as they walked on, still they felt the individualising power of the worship of God, who sees the heart. Each one speaks, sings, worships for himself and for herself. Not as voices only and 'parts,' but dealing personally with God. And note the great thoughts of God that each soul, so thrown upon itself, cherishes—'which made heaven and earth.' That is not sentiment: it is worship. That is the sort of thought which fills the Jewish pilgrim on his way to the Feast. In no other country at that period did such a thought meet the eye of God in a soul made by Him, or such a song enter His ear as He bent down from on high.

Psalm cxxi.

What sort of 'help' (ver. 1) does he mean? How natural it is for a pilgrim to think, first of all, of his 'feet being kept'! He is on a long journey; any injury to a foot makes him helpless. Hence it is a serious thing to 'stumble'; or to 'dash his foot against a stone.' God knows our need and our weakness, and He 'teaches us to pray.'

What Help does he mean?

But the day is long (*how* long it seems on a journey by foot!), and there are dangers by night perhaps greater than by day. May not our Keeper (blessed heaven-taught description of God!) forget us? May He not slumber at noontide, or sleep by night? Ah! this Psalmist *knows God.* He has

Psalm cxxi.

thought out his creed! He has meditated on the nature and character of the Creator of Heaven and Earth! 'He that keepeth *thee* will not slumber!' (ver. 3). There is no fatigue with God: He is always ready; His 'help' always at hand, and always sure!

For Israel.

What makes this so sure? Because we belong to 'Israel.' Note how the assurance as to himself has broadened out to the whole people. 'Israel'! The memory of the olden Promise has come back; 'thy name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name.' The thought of Bethel makes life safe. God's Covenant is the sphere of Prayer. Neither by day will God slumber, nor by night will He sleep, for Israel's sake!

Thy Keeper.

Ever awake and ever present, what is Jehovah to me? He is '*thy Keeper.*' Again, it is personal, individual. The safety of all Israel is a grand thought: *my* safety is a precious one for me! And what does it mean? How far does it go? He is 'thy Shade' at 'thy right hand.' When the burning sun shines, fear not; He does not 'slumber,' the sun shall not smite. Not for a moment canst thou stumble, He is at thy right hand; touch Him, hold fast—nay, He will hold *thee* fast! When the moon shines by night, how brilliant, but how dangerous! Fear not, He will not 'sleep.' No sunstroke is possible for this trusting pilgrim; no stroke of the moon can harm him. Sing on, pilgrim, to Zion; Jehovah is thy Keeper.

Something More.

'Jehovah shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul' (ver. 7). But perhaps by

this time the question has forced itself upon us, what is meant by the change of the *first* person into the *second*? In vers. 1, 2, it was *I* and *my*; now it is *thee* and *thine*! It is no longer a prayer: some one is speaking to me! Who is it? It is myself! My heart speaks silently to me before God, and tells me all these blessed truths. Very early in the Psalter we were taught this lesson. In Ps. iv. 4 we read, 'Commune *with thine own heart.*' The change of person here is the communion that is meant. I speak to my heart: or, my heart speaks to me! These are different; but together, they make up the meditation which is meant. Psalm cxxi.

Here then (ver. 7) we tell ourselves that God will keep us 'from all evil.' Almost everything may be turned into evil; much that is apparently 'evil' may be turned into good. Great earthly prosperity is an example of the former: sickness, and even trial, may be taken as instances of the latter. Here is the truth, God is willing to keep us from all the 'evil' in life, either by disposing of outward events according to our need, or by sanctifying for us whatever comes. What does God Keep?

And then how the Psalmist goes into detail. Having said 'all evil,' we think there is nothing more to be added. Ah! how hasty we are! There is our 'going out,' that is *to business*, or sometimes it is *to pleasure*. What a sphere for Temptation! What need for prayer, and watchfulness; in a word, for *Keeping*! Well, in Business, and in Pleasure too, 'He *shall*' (or, as the American Revised Version beautifully reminds us, 'He *will*') keep us. Yea, Our going out and coming in.

Psalm. cxxi.

He will keep our *Soul*! Note all the things the Psalm specifies as 'kept' of God—thy 'foot' (ver. 3), thy 'head' (ver. 6), thy 'soul' (ver. 7), thy 'business' (ver. 8). And then once more, but not less needful or less blessed, '*thy coming in*' (ver. 8). That is, our *Home life*! Where we are either at our *best*; or at our *worst*! Where the temptation is least, or greatest. Where most of our life, after all, is spent. Which is always hard to sanctify, but which, when sanctified, is the very best. Heaven has indeed begun, when the Home is kept by God.

When may this begin?

One other thought fills the close of the Psalm. The Amen is reserved for the end. A wonderful description has been given of what God will do for us in the matter of 'keeping.' And most of us have to say sadly, Alas! we do not know it yet! Perhaps it will be some day: but when? And the answer is—*it may begin at once*! 'From this time forth.' It is a new starting-point. 'Old things shall pass away; and all things shall become new.' But how? *By closing with God's offer of grace.* God offers to be our Keeper; and such a keeper as is here described: do we *accept* the offer? Definitely? And do we go to God and tell Him so? The moment that is done, a new state of things begins. The cloud has moved on: and we follow. It is what St Peter calls 'committing the keeping of our souls unto the faithful Creator' (1 Pet. iv. 19). A definite act, of confiding, trustful, childlike faith! 'From this time forth'! Ah! yes! It is good to think of. But,—how long will it last? For a week? Till we forget? Till we are tempted? Nay, nay, the

Psalmist tells us. *He* knew so much better. It is 'Even for Evermore'! (ver. 8). It is his last word here. Are we surprised that *he* had found out the secret which we long to know? God had taught him; even as He is here teaching us! Psalm cxxi.

PSALM CXXII

1. I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.
2. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.
3. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together:
4. Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord.
5. For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.
6. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.
7. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.
8. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee.
9. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good.

PSALM CXXII

MY FATHER'S HOUSE

A THIRD Pilgrim Psalm, which describes the feelings with which the company set out for Zion, and the anticipation of seeing it and worshipping there! 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into' (*unto*, or *up to*) 'the House of the Lord' (ver. 1). A hope perhaps long cherished, for which one had to wait. But now the way was cleared. The difficulties were gone. And the proposal was made that I too should join and go with them,—'I was glad'! Psalm cxxii.

Let us follow the Psalm, verse by verse. First (ver. 1) we have the companions on the way. 'Let *us* go up,' 'they said.' Family and relatives, 'kinsfolk and acquaintances'! How much depends on our companions in such a journey! Nothing tries temper and patience more than travelling together. Especially this is true when a pious purpose and object are in view. There is no greater help than a sympathetic company; and no more trying experience than to be with those whose longings and hopes are different from our own. The Psalmist knew that his company was seeking God. Companions.

The one expectation was that soon, very soon, their feet should actually be standing within the gates of Jerusalem, as it was.

Psalm cxxii.

Jerusalem; and the Psalm apostrophises the city of God. *Thy* gates! thy walls! Yes, we shall soon stand there! They had heard of it all from their early years. Parents had described it to them. The hope had long been held out that they too might go, might join in its songs and sacrifices, and might worship there. Whether they were Jews in the land, still more if they were exiles returning homeward to see what had already begun to be called 'The Holy City' —and what is once in Scripture (Zech. ii. 12) called '*the Holy Land*'—the journey was an event in life. What a picture of Jerusalem is before us! Difficult for us now to appreciate, for much of the beauty has departed, and is literally buried in the ruins which lie many feet deep.

To-day.

One can still recognise the outlines. Jerusalem is still a city which is 'compact together': small, four-square, walled on every side; standing over the Kedron Valley; with a still deeper valley on the south, known as Hinnom, and sometimes as 'Gehenna'; with the pool of Gihon on the west, and the square Tower of David; and on the north, beyond the Damascus Gate, the 'Green Hill' of Golgotha, and the grotto of Jeremiah at its foot; Mount Zion, covered with houses old and new, occupies the western part from north to south. The deep Tyropœan valley, running north from the southern wall, and at its northern part branching westwards by the Pool of Hezekiah. While on the eastern side of the valley rises the Hill of Moriah, on which Isaac was offered, on which the Temple stood. Covered now by the Mosque of Omar and the Temple Courts, with the Castle of Antoninus

at its northern side, far and wide visible to all around, the Holy City stands to this day. The same city which the Psalmist apostrophises. High above it on the east, the Mount of Olives and the Mount of Offence: the everlasting hills which have seen all its history from patriarchal days till now. What a history! What memories! The Beloved of the Lord! The Birthplace of the Saints! 'I was glad when they said unto Me, Let us go up unto the House of Jehovah'! Psalm cxxii.

There follows in the Psalm a mention of the 'Thrones of Judgment,' thrones of the House of David. The meaning probably is that from generation to generation the royal descendants of David judged the people there, administering righteous judgment in the name of the Lord. Some have maintained that the thrones of judgment were occupied by the sons of the reigning monarch, of whom there might be several at the same date; but this has no support from history. Thrones of Judgment.

Various petitions follow as uttered by the pilgrims in expectation of their visit. Note the three Prayers for Peace (vers. 6, 7, 8); accompanied in each case by one for the prosperity of the great city (vers. 6, 7, 9). The last of the three asks for the good of 'Jerusalem,' which is probably inclusive of prosperity and something more. We observe here, as in so many places, the threefold Blessing pronounced on the people. And the meaning of the double prayer for Peace and Prosperity doubtless is, that there may be, within and beneath, the Peace of God which is independent of all circumstances; and that there Prayers for Peace.

Psalm cxxii.

may also be that outward good and fruitfulness which all desire for their country and themselves. And what crowns this prayer is the closing thought. It is because of the 'House of Jehovah'; because Jerusalem is 'the Holy City'; because the Name of God in Covenant is there; it is *this* which stirs the hearts of His people from age to age, and makes every child of God glad to pray and plead for the good of Jerusalem and of Israel.

PSALM CXXIII

1. Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.
2. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us.
3. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt.
4. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.

PSALM CXXIII

THE EYE OF FAITH

Psalm cxxiii.

THIS Psalm is another of those called Pilgrim Psalms. Some (like Bishop Barry in his notes) regard it as the first of a subsection of four (Ps. cxxiii.-cxxvi.) pitched in a lower key, from a company of sorrowful exiles returning. But there is hardly ground for such subdivision; and there is danger of losing sight of the Pilgrim's Progress discernible in the whole group, as before explained. The present Psalm is a step in advance. Hitherto the eye is directed to the Hill of Zion and the City of Jerusalem: here it is resting only upon God. The nearness of the earthly city has brought the soul nearer to God Himself. There has been great sorrow, but it has been blessed in shutting up the worshipper to the One Source of Consolation. It has done its work.

Divisions of the Psalm.

How naturally the Psalm falls into three divisions, so simple and yet so full. I *look*; I *wait*; I *pray*.

Looking unto God! Observe how the Name of God is reserved till the close of the second verse. The one thought expressed is, 'Unto Thee, O Thou that dwellest in the Heavens!' Better, Thou that *sittest* in the Heavens; an expression found more than once in the Psalter. May it not be said that it conveys the twofold picture of the Rest of God and of

His Throne? The former comes very naturally into the foreground. 'He sitteth'! There is no hurry, no disquiet. The Throne is occupied. The eye of the Psalmist sees not, or does not care to see, the multitude around it, Angels and the Blessed: he can only think of Him who is enthroned there! Not dwells in Zion (at least, not in the same sense), but there, in the Heavens, He is, from Age to Age! And the Pilgrim moving on and up with his company breaks silence, 'O Thou that sittest in the Heavens, unto Thee I lift up mine eyes!' Psalm cxxiii.

I wait. This is the second division, though the word *wait* does not occur. But it is implied. Sometimes the things not spoken are the more intense. And here are two subordinate pictures which describe the attitude of the soul. Slaves waiting on their master, with bowed head and hands crossed over the bosom; but with clear eyes watching the Master. And one handmaiden standing near her mistress, ready to anticipate any wish of hers. The thought seems not that of fear, because of 'the hand' that may smite: but, as Canon Cheyne suggests, it is the Hand of Authority, the symbol of power and position. It is the eye that the servant watches, who desires to give perfect service. A look passes, which is enough. And so with God and the Believer. Let me see Thy Face! Turn to me Thy Countenance! And I am content to wait. We need to wait on God. God's measures of time are never ours. Nineteen hundred years ago our Master said, 'Behold, I come quickly!' And He has not come *yet*! God's dealings with us depend on our pre- Waiting on God.

Psalm cxxiii.

paration, and that is often slow. We do not know what God is aiming at, and therefore waiting for. 'Our eyes look unto Jehovah our Elohim, *until* He have mercy upon us!' We do not fight for it, or struggle: we look, and we wait! Faith's hardest work is sometimes its waiting. 'Looking' is a full occupation often for a devout soul!

Third Division.

I *pray.* Or rather, note how the *I* of the first verse has passed into the *we* of vers. 2, 3, and 4. The solitary prayer has changed into that of the 'two or three' who agree together. The closet prayer has widened into the prayer of the pilgrim band. They are all looking; they are all asking. Waiting 'until He have mercy.' And the thought put into words kindles the fire, '*Have* mercy, O Jehovah!' Not a word about time! Not a trace of impatience! Only 'have mercy!' And the reason is given, the urgency of the cry explained. 'We are exceedingly filled with contempt.' What a vigorous expression! Even Paul's 'exceedinglys' hardly equal this. It is the word of a company who have been trodden in the mire! 'Contempt, scoffing, contempt.' And the people who have spat upon them and trodden them down, 'were at ease'—sitting in their silks, or their furs, as if the air were not good enough for them to breathe; as if the neighbourhood of Jewish worshippers were odious; as if they would hardly deign to look upon the dirty and contemptible neighbours who have intruded on their sight. The poor Jews are 'a reproach of men and despised of the people.' The Apostles afterwards came to know it and *to be it.* The poor Jews feel it to this day!

And the Psalmist drank of the same cup! 'Have mercy upon us, O Jehovah; have mercy upon us!' Psalm cxxiii.

Seeing God and Ourselves.

It is possible that this Psalm, in the position which it holds among the Pilgrim Psalms, is meant to show us that when we come to have a nearer view of God, we find it to be an awful experience which we did not quite expect; and that one of the things which it shows is an awful view of ourselves! We none of us understand the Greatness, the Glory of our God. And alas! we none of us know how bad we ourselves are. What if the 'exceeding contempt' of our enemies should come to be increased by our own feeling when we see ourselves as God sees us! And what if the step to reach that sight is just the seeing God's glory? The enemies are often mistaken in what they say or think. But if they knew all, would they not think perchance even worse of us? Do we ever think of what it meant that when Daniel saw Gabriel, 'he fainted, and was sick for days'? Still more, have we ever seen the meaning of the fact that when the Apostle John, yes, even *he*, saw the Lord Jesus for the first time in glory, he 'fell at His feet, as dead'? A nearer view of God means a deeper abasement of ourselves.

This Pilgrim Psalm shows us a believer getting nearer the end of his journey, nearer Heaven, nearer God: is it not so, that he comes to feel his own unfitness more deeply than ever before?

PSALM CXXIV

1. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Israel say;
2. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us:
3. Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:
4. Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul:
5. Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.
6. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.
7. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.
8. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

PSALM CXXIV

OUR SHIELD

Another Pilgrim Psalm, which apparently records a great Danger and a great Deliverance. It is written in a strain of triumph which can only be expressed by a song. No greater Danger is recorded in the Psalter, and no more complete Deliverance. **Psalm cxxiv.**

Could we have the details of the historic facts which the Psalmist has here recorded, no doubt our blood would be still more stirred. But it is vain to wish for it. As in most cases, the events, out of which our Psalms started under Divine Inspiration, have not been made known, just in order that all peoples and all circumstances should be covered by them, to the close of the Christian era.

The great unknown Danger.

First, there is the Danger, unknown and undescribed. 'Israel'—no doubt the nation as a whole, but called by the name of the patriarch, who 'as a prince had power with God'—had been apparently almost destroyed. Cruel men had risen up, ready to swallow them alive, as our word 'quick' means here. Note the three Images employed—heaped together to express the risk and its imminence. It was like a wild beast ready to spring from its lair upon them. It was like a flood of waters which had risen, and was ready to over-

Psalm cxxiv.

whelm and drown them. It was like a net thrown over a fluttering bird, which beat its wings against the snare in vain. They were hopeless of remedy by any human power. Possibly, the company travelling up to Zion had been endangered, and was nearly destroyed by night. Possibly, the exiles had been threatened with death by some heathen edict. It affected not merely the Psalmist, but many. This is not a personal mercy, but a national one. The Psalmist is but a voice crying in the way to the city or in its shadow, a voice to the gratitude and confidence of the people.

The Deliverance.

We look then next at the Deliverance, which is commemorated here. This also is not described in detail, but enough is indicated to make it a useful song for many occasions.

It was *sudden*—done in a moment! When the wild beast was just about to spring; when the flood had actually begun to roar; when the net had already caught the bird—then it was found that God had *not* abandoned them. He had not been too far off to hear. He had not been too busy with Heavenly things to see. He had not been too high to care. He had Himself interposed. Often in the Old Testament, we have the thought of Interposition, through angels or otherwise. Elsewhere, and here, the other thought of direct personal Interposition is conveyed. God's own hand stretched down. God Himself present and giving the victory. This last is the precious thought. It survives the use of means. It gives the assurance that God is in the means, and is the strength of them. It allows

the heart to cling to the Deliverer, and not to rest in the mere Deliverance. It is one of the secrets of the Christian Life—God Himself, *for* us, *with* us—nay, when we can receive it, IN US! Psalm cxxiv.

The Name.

And so the Psalm ends in this shout of satisfaction and content. 'Our help'—the help of those who have just escaped Ruin and Death—'Our Help is in the Name of Jehovah, who made Heaven and Earth.' The Name! Note (vers. 1, 2, 6, 8) in this short Psalm, the Name Jehovah, the Covenant God four times dwelt on. In one case, the words are, 'Blessed be Jehovah!' The meaning which occurs readily to us is, Let Jehovah *be blessed* of His people, thanked by them for this great mercy? But may we not find a deeper meaning for ourselves! 'Blessed be Jehovah.' *The blessedness of Jehovah lies in blessing and delivering His people!* The very joy of God lies in His being and doing good! *That* is a thought surely for a week's meditation, if we would take it in.

And it does not lessen the Infinite greatness of God to think of it so. It goes with the greatness of the Creator. The greatness and the mercy heighten each other. 'Our Help is in the Name of Jehovah, *who made Heaven and Earth.*'

PSALM CXXV

1. They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.
2. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.
3. For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.
4. Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.
5. As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.

PSALM CXXV

THE BELIEVER'S BLESSING

THIS Pilgrim Psalm is one which links the praise of Zion with spiritual blessings. It testifies to the conviction that behind and beneath all national privilege there was a personal blessing for the man whose heart was set on God. Psalm CXXV.

We begin with the beautiful definition of a righteous man given in the opening verse. Who are the Righteous—the true Israel, who obtain and inherit the Promises? This verse answers—'*They that trust in the Lord.*' It is a remarkable anticipation of New Testament teaching. It gives us the substance of Paul's reply to the jailor at Philippi, except its implied reference to the Cross — 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' 'They that trust in the Lord.' And if it be answered by any, that the specialty of Paul's teaching in that place is that Jesus Christ is the object of trust, it may be replied that the Jehovah of the Psalmist and the Christ of the Apostle are one and the same. We may therefore call the Psalm the *Believer's* Blessing. The Righteous Man.

It compares believers, in a body, to Mount Zion, and that in two respects. It remains unshaken after all the attacks made upon it; and it abides 'for Like unto Zion.

Psalm cxxv.

ever.' In other words, neither violence nor time can overthrow it. This speaks of the joy of the pilgrim company in standing upon Zion. Their hearts leap up when they think their feet are on that sacred ground. Perhaps no one save the Jew can fully understand what such an experience means. But something like it is known to the Christian man who, even in these days, finds himself in Jerusalem. It is difficult to believe that we are *there;* and the sight of it rises before us years afterwards in 'the bliss of solitude.' A visit to the Holy Land gives us continual visions of it as we read the Word. So these pilgrims in the olden time rejoiced. Here is the city unshaken, after all the attacks by the enemy; here it will be, century after century, when all other buildings and cities of that date are in the dust! And this is the picture, the likeness of them 'that trust in Jehovah.' How much of the future of man after death the Psalmists knew, we cannot say; but their words involve much, if not most, of what we now believe. The ages pass; the mountains depart; but 'they that trust in Jehovah' abide for ever!

God is their Keeper.

Again the thought is dwelt on, in another and a higher form. From all God's doings, and gifts, the Psalm rises to God Himself—one of the highest lessons that man can learn. The outward world may lead us up, by suggestion, to Himself. These mountains that stand round Jerusalem and look down upon it, making a strong Defence for it, are *like God!* He is 'the wall of fire.' He is the Invisible Presence, who knows all that is going on,

and all the need for Him, and is therefore never too late. 'Jehovah is round about His people.' Psalm cxxv.

In every storm He is in the boat, though He seems to be asleep. In every danger we have only to look for Him, to find Him there. It was so in the olden time, and it is so now. It is 'from henceforth, and it shall be for ever.' It is so now, in order that 'the rod of the wicked,' their power, their authority, their vengeance shall not rest upon His people. That is often their trouble and their temptation. Where is God? Hath God forgotten? Ah! the 'rod of the wicked shall not *rest* upon them'; it may touch, it may smite once or twice, but it does not 'rest.' There is deliverance from it. And the secret is for them 'who trust in Jehovah.' *Trust*, if you would be delivered! Trust, and all is yours! The Psalmist knew this, wherefore he teaches it; and he has been teaching it for nearly 3000 years!

The short Psalm is almost done, but before it ends it passes into a prayer. Hitherto it has been rejoicing in the truth about Jehovah and His people; but there remains something to ask. 'Do good, O Jehovah! unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts' (ver. 4). The thought of the prayer is not without parallels in the Psalms and in Nehemiah. But the language is unusual and striking, if for nothing else, from the fact that the two things which, in Ps. xxv. 8, are ascribed to God Himself, are the two things which are here pleaded as the reasons for His people being blessed. In the Psalm which we quote, the words are, 'Good and upright is Jehovah': and here, 'Do A Prayer

Psalm cxxv.

good to them that *be good and upright.*' In other words, those men who are godly, who by grace have become *like God*, are they whom the Psalmist asks to be blessed. Yes: it is a great truth. They are blessed already, because they are like Him. The great Blessing is not what godliness brings, but what it is! God cannot but bless them still further. He has blessed them by making them what they are.

The Warning.

But 'as for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways' (ver. 5); for such as *fall back into* crooked ways, which were theirs before, and from which for a time they have been partially delivered—a danger ever waiting on those who have come to know something of God,—'Jehovah will lead them forth with the workers of Iniquity.' For why? They have taken their place with these—they have fallen into line with them. They have been tempted and have fallen. How far they can fall, how far they shall suffer for it, is not stated here.

But let there be no presumption, no undervaluing the evil of sin and its consequences. It always brings a curse. Even Moses, even Aaron, and Miriam, came to know that of old. Surely we, much more, because of our light, shall know it. Let us be warned, every one of us! The Psalmist's warning stands!

Israel.

But it is not on this note that the Psalm and its music ends. The Pilgrim sees the sun go down in calm. 'But,' he writes, that precious 'BUT'!—'Peace shall be upon Israel'! Jesus stood in the midst, and saith unto them, 'PEACE BE UNTO YOU'!

PSALM CXXVI

1. When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.
2. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them.
3. The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.
4. Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south.
5. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.
6. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

PSALM CXXVI

A SONG OF RELEASE

Psalm cxxvi.

This bears, on the face of it, to be a song over Deliverance from Captivity. We naturally think of that best known to us. A Captivity in Babylon. Probably that is the reference. Though it is important to remember, here and elsewhere, that there were captivities, one or more, alluded to but not detailed, in the story of Israel. One of these is referred to in 2 Chron. xxix. 9, in the time of King Hezekiah, affecting the wives and children of 'Judah and Jerusalem' (ver. 8). Possibly it is the event recorded in chap. xxviii. 5, where many captives are said to have been taken to Damascus. We must not be too confident that all the 'captivities' named in the Psalter refer to that in Babylon, but leave the question open to be disposed of in detail.

A Dream?

So great was the joy of those who returned to Zion, that they 'were like unto them that Dream.' They thought they were dreaming, and would wake in captivity again. Or they thought that the captivity was but a nightmare, from which they had wakened to find that they had never been away from Zion. The joy was equally great, and after the manner of the Jews it was expressed in loud song and laughter. The people round could not but take

notice of it, and they gave in a manner glory to Jehovah for their deliverance. That struck the right keynote. 'Yes, Jehovah *hath* done great things for us, whereof we are glad!' Full acknowledgment and confession openly made for once! And taught them by heathens, who could not be silent. Others saw what they might themselves have passed over. Others spoke out; and *they* could not be still. They had learned their lesson, and now their joy passed into prayer. Psalm cxxvi.

There were some, probably many, captives who had been left behind. It had been only a partial restoration to Zion. If the Psalm refers to Babylon, the return under Jerubbabel was a very partial one. More were left than those who came away. It is good to see that the happy souls who 'dreamed,' also prayed. They prayed for those who were still left behind. 'Turn again our captivity, O Jehovah' (ver. 4). Turn what remains. Release those who are still in bondage. Give them what Thou hast given us! 'Even as the streams in the South:' in the *Negeb*, south of Judah, where the dry beds of sand and stone are filled with the flowing and gurgling water, when the Rains set in! Oh may the Rain of Heaven visit the dry land of Israel! The Prayer.

Then follows the thought of 'Sowing' and of 'Reaping' thereafter; but what is the connection? Is it that the time of the Rain is the time of Sowing, and that the first duty of the returned exile is to sow a land that has been left barren? And that now they have to sow their neglected fields? The Sower.

Psalm cxxvi.

And does the thought of the sowing of the earth's seed lead them on to higher things? to Prayer as the seed, and to Return as the harvest? Some such connection there seems to be, not direct, but emotional, the links of which are not made clear. But here we have three lines of truth springing out at the close of the Psalm. *The Sower and his troubles.* How often these go with the Sowing, especially in higher things! The seed is difficult to get, it is rather indifferent, it has been the product of a poor season, it has been injured in keeping. And the Sower suspects that it is so, and is discouraged. Or he has other troubles. There may be sickness at home. There may be poverty. There may be disputes and unhappiness. And in spiritual things the soul may have a poor time of prayer, not earnest, not full, not urgent, not getting hold of God, saying to himself sorrowfully, 'I cannot pray as I would.' My work is not watered, as it should be, with the tears of the heart; the Spring-time has been dry! What a contrast between the singers of the second and third verses, and the same souls (ver. 6) when they take to sowing in 'tears'! And what is the cause? Is it what we all have more or less to acknowledge, that our joy in what we receive from God is often coupled with want of joy, when we have to plead with God? That all the goodness of the past fails to melt us, when we have to labour and trust for the Future? At all events, here is the fact, that the sowing of the Good Seed by the Believer is often a dull time, one of sorrow, one of complaint, one of little hope! That the time of our trouble and our tears, is the

time when we must sow precious seed, and when we fear that we have very little of the seed to sow! Psalm cxxvi.

We have next the certainty of the Harvest. That is, of *this* Harvest, in spiritual things. The returned Jews facing the neglected fields and scattering their seed in despondency, knew that with patience and toil Harvest would come. Some Harvest there was sure to be. The Land of Promise, desolate as it was, would again flourish and be clothed with corn and plenty. The old promise of God was sure, and they would wait for it. It is the waiting that is the trial. Sowing in tears and waiting in anxiety, and perhaps in want. Yes, it was not altogether a joyful time for the returned exiles. They had their troubles. But they would rest on the Word of God, and the result was sure. The Harvest.

So that the Psalm rises to the thought of the happy reaping-time, when the only tears to be shed would be those of joy. When the reapers in their mirth would hardly believe they had been so downcast. When all past troubles seemed small because their present reward was so great. Some dim suggestion comes from the words as to God's own Harvest. How hard and dry was the sowing time of the world's history! How many and bitter the tears with which our Master sowed the seed! How long God has to wait till the angels be sent forth to reap the Harvest of the earth when it is fully ripe! But then how great the joy over the saved! Over Redemption completed! Over the ransomed earth! Over the Family of Heaven! And for us The Reaping-time.

Psalm cxxvi.

the children of the King, and Workers in the Vineyard, when we, after trial and tears, enter on our inheritance! The joy of the reapers is only the greater because of the weeping that accompanied the Sowing of the Seed!

PSALM CXXVII

1. Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

2. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.

3. Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

4. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.

5. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.

PSALM CXXVII

GOD IS ALL IN ALL

Psalm cxxvii.

THIS Psalm is difficult to understand till we remember that it is a Pilgrim Psalm, and must be interpreted in that light. Now, if we think of the returning captives finding Jerusalem broken down and unwalled, what are the things which would naturally be the objects of their first concern? Probably three. A house in which they might live, the safety of the city where they would reside, and the difficulty of providing for and rearing the young children who might be given them. These are precisely the three things which this Psalm deals with.

The House.

Where are the returned exiles to live? Amid the ruined palaces and hovels. Where are they to obtain houses which they may call their own? They must clear away the ruins and build for themselves. This was no easy work. To avoid competing with others who might choose the same corner, to obtain the exclusive right to the place where they built, and then to clear the ground and build for themselves, this was the first task. Did *prayer* enter into it at all? Did they pray as well as build? Did they pray before and while they built? Then the lesson was writ upon their hearts, 'Except Jehovah build

our house, we labour in vain'! It is the first of the three 'in vains' on which the Psalmist sets his mark. God must build the walls, otherwise our labour is in vain. The pilgrims learnt the truth. And we, pilgrims to the Heavenly Land, have we learned it yet? Building day by day, do we know that God must be doing it through our efforts? The Psalmist knew this, and Paul knew it (1 Cor. iii. 10): it was 'through the grace of God which was given unto me' that he laid a foundation, and builded upon it. Let us seek to know it also, and to labour and to live in the light of it! Psalm cxxvii.

But what of the enemies who were round about Jerusalem, and had so often shown their hatred, and triumphed in her overthrow? Why did they not take the city, when it was held only by the few poor and feeble bands which came back from captivity? Had there been no other power to defend it, the city had not stood a week. But behind the feeble 'watchman' there was One who 'kept the city.' Jehovah! He 'that keepeth Israel.' Otherwise it had been 'in vain.' The second 'in vain' of our Psalm—the keeping power of the Lord! Precious to the individual soul! Precious also to the community which knew that truth, and had courage enough to testify to it! In days when such testimony was much more common than it is now, when the community had a conscience, the chief city in Scotland chose a text as its motto, and chose *this* text out of all those in the Bible to be their guiding thought. Edinburgh was too often in the olden time a city of violence and turbulence, but its founders The Keeping of the City.

Psalm cxxvii.

and early rulers inscribed upon their flag, 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord *keep the city*, the watchman waketh but in vain.'

Labour in vain.

A third 'in vain' is before the Psalmist's eye. For the labouring man, for the business man, for the *working* man (in whatever work), the daily toil is vain which is done without dependence on God. Rising early and going late to bed, toiling with sweat of body or brain, these are not enough to ensure success. It is 'vain for you.' It obtains something, but not the great result, and it does not last. Whereas, if God has His right place, which is 'at the head' of all labour, then labour is blest indeed. And there comes with it and through it a marvellous Peace. We rest in our work. Sleep comes by night, to sweeten the toil by day. Sleep! One of God's greatest gifts.

Sleep!

This is one of the few places in Scripture where God's goodness in giving sleep is pointed out. It is elsewhere (Prov. iii. 24) mentioned as a special reward of the upright man, 'thy sleep shall be sweet.'

> 'What would we give to our beloved?
> *He* giveth His Beloved sleep!
> . . . . . .
> More softly than the dew is shed,
> Or cloud is floated overhead,
> He giveth His Beloved sleep!'

The Children.

But there is a third section of this Pilgrim Psalm which we must try to understand. Palestine had

been practically depopulated in many places during the years of the Babylonian Captivity; and after the immediate provision for those who returned, the most important work was to fill the land with a new generation. This was all the more difficult, because many children would not be born in the long journey from Babylon homewards, nor for a time thereafter. But, after preparation had been made of house and field, the greatest benefit that could be bestowed on the thin population would be the birth of children! Never would infants be more welcome! Never God's smile more visible than over a cradle! Never sweeter music than a child's cry! And *this* we can see is in the Psalmist's mind. This is kindling his spirit as he sings. And this gives point to his language about the 'children of youth.' Our Colonies have over and over again learned the lesson, and I should not be surprised if they made this Psalm one of their chief favourites. 'The sons of youth' are blessings to the old man. They are strength for him, and he leans upon them. They are a defence for him in troublous times, as 'arrows in the hands of the mighty.' 'Happy is the man that has his quiver full of them.' Happy the man who has learned the lesson of the Psalm, that 'God is all in all!'

Psalm cxxvii.

PSALM CXXVIII

1. Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways.
2. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.
3. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.
4. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord.
5. The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.
6. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel.

PSALM CXXVIII

'MANIFOLD MORE IN THIS PRESENT TIME'

Psalm cxxviii.

THIS and the following Psalm, both 'Songs of Degrees,' are to be taken as a couplet representing two dealings of God with His people. The present Psalm shows the earthly blessings which follow the true servant of God, and the next shows how, even in troubles, God's people are comforted and kept.

Blessings in Earthly Life.

It is not only the Old Testament which promises earthly good to God's servants. Our Lord specially told His Disciples that they should have 'manifold more in this present time.' It is obvious that a holy life is conducive to health, happiness, usefulness, and even longevity. Sin is the enemy of health. Sin and decay are brothers, if not friends. In this Psalm, the life and character of a godly man are set forth, showing the bright side of earthly life which is spent under the eye of God. There are eight things on which the Psalmist lovingly dwells, and on which we may look with him.

Fearing God.

First, he is speaking of 'the man that feareth Jehovah'—the individual man, in whose character this is seen as the leading feature, sometimes summing it all up, and at all times being at the

Psalm cxxviii.

foundation. It must make the greatest difference, and it does.

Walking in God's Ways.

The second mark of the servant is that he 'walketh in the ways of Jehovah.' His fear becomes practical. It issues in character. It has already changed it, and is doing so more every year. The Bible knows nothing of a believer whose faith does not touch his life. He who has only a name to live, is really dead. Every man who truly 'fears God' also 'walketh in His ways.' The *walk*, with its short steps, taken one by one, means the daily life of little things, into which God delights to come. But it is sometimes easier to find God in the great things of life than in the little ones. Great sorrows are more often sanctified for the Christian than petty cares. Some run a race for victory who do not watch their steps in the quiet walks of life. The Psalmist urges that these should go together—the 'fearing Jehovah,' and the 'walking in His ways.'

Work.

The third mark of God's people is *Work*. 'Thou shalt eat the labour of thy hands' (ver. 2). Note how by Grace the primeval curse almost has been changed into a blessing. 'Thou shalt eat the labour of thy hand . . . and it shall be well with thee.' The curse, *now*, is idleness. Those who have to work for their living are not tasting the bread of sorrow, but of content. Even the classes who do not work for their living, work for their comfort. Idleness is misery. Something to do! is the cry that comes from a big miserable heart. An idle Christian is nearly impossible.

Happiness.

The fourth mark of God's servant is that he is

Happy. 'Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee' (ver. 2). This is Old Testament teaching, be it remembered—Judaic teaching. Who describes the Christian as a gloomy creature, never pleased save when he is meditating upon death? It is an enemy. The Christian is a happy man. Of course his delight is not in worldly amusements like the racecourse and the theatre; but for genuine, unburdened, smiling days, no life is comparable to the Christian's. It is '*well with him.*' What more could we ask? Psalm cxxviii.

The Psalmist's fifth mark of the true servant of God is found in *his home.* The 'wife as a fruitful vine, . . . the children like olive plants around thy table' (ver. 3). The clinging vine, which cannot stand alone, repays the strength and stay of the strong arm! and the children, evergreen and fair, make the parent's heart glad with a new joy! Here is a picture on which one loves to dwell. *Home!* It is the centre of a man's life. All his work is on the outside, however long it occupies. Home is the inside of life. And when the smile of wife, and the laughter of children, meet the returning father; and he finds rest there, and in these things—'happy is he,' indeed. To find God at home is not always the easiest part of life. It is sometimes the hardest. But it needs to be sought. And when found, in patience, and self-forgetfulness, it is, perhaps, the best. His Home.

Again the Psalmist reverts to the truth, that God's servant 'feareth Jehovah.' Coming here in the midst of the life that is described, I take it to Worship.

Psalm cxxviii.

refer to his *worship* of God. Shall I say his *daily worship?* I mean that of the *closet*, and that of the *family*. Think what it would mean to find a Christian without either of these two things. Do they hold so small a place in his life as to be inconsiderable? The *family worship*—what, and how much, is that to us? How much of the blessing of the home, for parents, children, and servants, comes from it? Who dare say? Yes—and who dare forget? And behind all family worship, and daily life, there lies the closet! Our solitary time with God. When two voices may be heard—God's voice to us, in Scripture chiefly, as we read, and meditate: but also His voice within our hearts, spoken by the Holy Spirit, guiding, withholding, urging, cheering—*the still, small voice!* heard by ourselves only. Then our voice is heard speaking to God; speaking often audibly, as we shall find to be good for us, something that makes it more real, and more definite. Such is a Christian's worship in daily life!

Children's Children and Native Land.

The Psalmist adds two other things. 'Thy children's children'—our descendants in the third generation. It is an anticipation of the far future. Something that many Christians see only when they get to Heaven, and wait till future years bring, one by one, those whom we left as little ones, or perhaps were not born till we had gone! A blessed meeting which many of us shall have! Not less blessed than coming to know those ancestors, of whom we have heard and dreamed, who have been there waiting for *us* many years already!

Then the *native land!* Jews were true patriots. Pious Jews were warm patriots. 'Peace upon Israel!' is the crown of many a song, the height of many an aspiration, the deepest breathing of many a prayer. And we, who have *two* countries of our own: the country of our Birth, and *Israel*, the country of Christ's Birth—shall not we also join? Psalm cxxviii.

PSALM CXXIX

1. Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say:
2. Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me.
3. The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.
4. The Lord is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.
5. Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion.
6. Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up:
7. Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom.
8. Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord.

PSALM CXXIX

THE LORD MY DEFENCE

Psalm cxxix.

THIS Psalm is the complement of the one preceding it. That showed the many earthly blessings of the believing life; but it left out of view cases of affliction with which in this Psalm the writer deals.

Israel speaks.

He begins with the people of Israel—begins with that abruptness, leaping into the heart of his subject, which we have so often met with in the Psalms. The speaker is Israel, the nation personified: 'Much and often have I been afflicted, even from my youth: yea, much and often, even from my youth' (ver. 2). From the beginning of the national life, in Egypt, until now! There was the miserable bondage under Pharaoh; there were the forty years of the wilderness; there was the long struggle with Canaanites and Philistines; there was the division and Secession in the time of Solomon's son; the wars with Egypt, Syria, and Assyria; and the Captivity in Babylon.

Personal.

It was one long history of attack and oppression for the people of God. Behind this national story we may see a faint background of personal experience. The Psalmist has tasted bitterness in life. He has known even from his youth what it is to have rivals, enemies, opponents. '*I, too,*' he seems to cry in an undertone of memory!

Psalm cxxix.

Ploughing on my Back.

The only detail given us of Israel's troubles in her many conflicts is one that is highly figurative. One of the well-known prophetic pictures of the degradation of the nation is that Zion should be as 'a ploughed field.' Micah's warning was literally fulfilled in the Babylon days, as it has been more than once since. But the personal element here also breaks through: and there seems to be a reference here to the degrading and painful punishment of scourging, to which many of the Israelites were subjected, from Egypt down to later days. All which is included in the cry with which Israel and the Psalmist open the Psalm.

Defence.

The enemy had done his worst. But there are two things which can thankfully be said. In the many sore afflictions, 'they have not prevailed against me' (ver. 2). It is a very wide and indefinite expression, because it includes a great deal. They have not prevailed (1) so as to make me renounce God. The bitterness against Israel in many cases was, that they looked with such contempt on the gods of the nations. Their contempt wakened a consciousness on the part of the idolaters that it was deserved, and that their priests had befooled them. And this was too sore a thought to be borne. Israel held to their One great and Holy God! (2) The enemies had not prevailed to make them renounce their national existence and accept a foreign rule. They were a small, poor people, not equal to one of the provinces of Egypt, or Assyria, or Babylon; and how could they dare to stand alone, with their own king and their own

laws! And (3) the enemies had not prevailed to make them lose confidence in Jehovah. *This*, perhaps, was the leading thought in the Psalmist's mind, and he lays it as a prayer at the feet of God. Psalm cxxix.

He tells us that on looking back on the long history of Israel from Egypt down, the great truth appears to him that 'Jehovah is Righteous.' The righteousness of God! This was *the* lesson taught him by the national story! Is it not a wonderful thought? Are there many teachings of the Psalter which can be compared to it for weight and grandeur? And, as if to apply the truth to the circumstances with which he is dealing, he adds that Jehovah 'hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked'—the fetters with which Israel had been bound! That is the end of their captivity. It is the celebration of their freedom. Here again, within and behind the national mercy, we can see the personal freedom which has been given, from the 'cords' and bonds of sin, to all who have 'trusted in' the Lord. Jehovah.

The second part of the Psalm is the short but striking picture that it gives us of the enemies of Zion; for they too have a history which is true in different ways of them all. They are 'confounded' at the failure of their efforts, and 'turned back.' To those who look at them in the light of God's Word and Law, they are like 'the grass which groweth on the house-tops,' poor, scanty, intrusive, withered as it grows up, not sufficient to feed a bird. No reaper is there. No harvest. And no blessing from God upon it. Here we have reproduced an older habit The Enemy.

Psalm cxxix.

which still in a measure survives, of men passing on life's way, and in the passing word, wishing that the 'Blessing of God' may fall on each other. It is the familiar '*God bless you!*' Derived, like most good things in life, from the Bible! Going back there to very old times—the times of Abraham, and the times of Boaz. The thought of God, to those who know Him, has always sweetened the life of man! Even over a fallen earth, the blessing of God smiles down, like a sunbeam, on those who 'trust Him!'

PSALM CXXX

1. Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord.
2. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.
3. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?
4. But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.
5. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.
6. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.
7. Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption,
8. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

PSALM CXXX

DE PROFUNDIS

Psalm cxxx.

This is another Pilgrim Psalm, though its opening gives so profound a sense of trouble and disquiet, that we almost lose sight of its place in the group. Something has occurred to bring the Psalmist very low; and though we do not know what it was, yet it seems to have carried with it some great sin (ver. 3). So that he is utterly cast down. He repents 'in dust and ashes.' The cry of the first verse is represented in translation as a past one: but the words convey the sense that the past trouble has not yet been exhausted, and continues still. He has, however, got the length of going to God with it, which is the beginning of comfort and cure. He is filled with emotion, which shows itself strangely in his use of the Names of God. Eight times in the eight verses: four times it is *Jehovah*; once it is *Jah*; three times *Adonai*. It is as if he had been dwelling on the character of God as shown in these different names, for comfort. And it comes!

Marking my Iniquities.

The beginning is almost inarticulate. First, there is a 'cry,' next a 'voice,' and then a 'supplication.' At this point the thought of his sin and of God's holiness overcomes him, and he says, 'If Thou, O Jah, shouldest mark iniquities' (in the plural), 'O

Adonai, who could stand?' (ver. 3). But God must mark them, He will not, He cannot pass them without notice. Either the Psalmist does not mean that, or he is too much cast down to mark his own words. He probably means, *continue to look closely at them.* But he, and we, must remember that God does see, and judge, and must punish sin, whatever it be. Only, 'there is forgiveness with Thee'—shall we complete the sense in our New Testament light? —*for all our sins have been laid upon the Sin-Bearer!* Dimly the Psalmist saw it: but in substance, he saw, he was assured, he was glad. Psalm cxxx.

To be sure of this forgiveness, and that it included him and his sins, he waited, and waited, and again waited, on God. We note the repetition: and he waits, not in despair, but in 'hope,' because of God's promise. Like the sentinel, or the nurse, watching for the morning light, feeling the importance of the help, and the need for it, and finding the hours pass slowly, yet he waits. The sense of sin was so deep, the trouble of conscience so great, the longing of the heart so real. Such penitence, such prayer, such trust and expectation—these are the heart of true prayer! Waiting on God.

That these cries were individual, we cannot doubt. They are indeed intensely personal and secret before the Lord. It sometimes comes home to us that we are intruding on a man's secret, as we listen or read. But how notable and full of meaning it is, that he goes on to transfer to his People, to Israel, all that he has been going through himself. Israel have 'iniquities' (ver. 8) of their own, national, Israel also.

Psalm cxxx.

great, and dark. God sees and knows them all. God has 'mercy' or loving-kindness for His people. And here we have a fuller statement of what the Psalmist has learned. God has 'Redemption'—nay, 'Plenteous Redemption' for them. So that 'Israel' may hope. The very name is full of it. It is a name of Promise. *Power with God* to prevail in prayer, in every time of need. The waiting soul, and the exiled Nation, are both at God's feet, who is Himself 'waiting to be gracious' unto them. We almost wonder that there is not a 'Hallelu-Jah,' at the end of such a Psalm!

PSALM CXXXI

1. Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.

2. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.

3. Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and for ever.

PSALM CXXXI

A CHILDLIKE SOUL

Psalm cxxxi.

THIS is one of the shortest and most distinctive of all the Psalms. It has the name of David by tradition as its author. To some it reads like the work of a very young man, who is quite unknown. To me, it reads as the work of an old man, resting after his labours are done, free from the troubles which used to beset him, waiting to see what God is to do with him. It is intensely personal; one almost feels that it was not meant by its author for any human eye. I could readily believe that it was written by the author of the previous Psalm, after the crisis was past, and that, 'from the depths' of a heart now at peace, this short song sprang up as from a fountain.

Its Contents

There are three great truths told us about the Psalmist by himself in this short word.

1. There is an expression of *Humility*. Not as a boast: it almost takes the form of a confession. It does not say, '*I am very humble.*' It is in form negative, what he does not do, or wish to do. The heart, the eyes, the hands, the *ego* which lies beneath them all—he has looked into each of these, and desires to tell Jehovah (in private!) what he has seen. The heart is not now, not any longer at all events,

'*haughty*'—not 'lifted up' (as the word is twice rendered in 2 Chron. xvii. 6, xxvi. 16), *elated* at the position given, and the mercy shown him. 'Nor mine eyes lofty,' thinking nothing too good for him, and few things good enough. 'Neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me' —he is describing his *walk*, his custom, and the work which he is doing. High thoughts have been put away. He had anticipated St Paul's counsel, 'Mind not high things, but condescend to things that are lowly' (Rom. xii. 16, Am. R.V.); or, perhaps, St Paul learned this from our Psalm. And the *ego*, which was wont to be assertive, had grown small, and quiet, and did not obtrude. He had become humble. Psalm cxxxi.

2. He was *Content.* Not perhaps without a struggle. He had 'quieted his soul.' He had seen that very day at home, or in some house near it, a picture in which he had come to recognise himself. It was that of a 'little child'; for the Holy Spirit had taught him beforehand what our Lord sought to teach us all, that we must become 'as little children' if we would enter the Kingdom. The child whom the Psalmist had seen that morning was a child just 'weaned,' and he looked and paused, and bethought himself, and said, Ah! that is just *like me*! The child had lost the thing he depended on most; what he would have said, if he could speak, was absolutely necessary to him; he could not understand why; it was the first thing like real cruelty that he had ever met; what had been given him instead was not nearly so good, and Content.

Psalm cxxxi.

life had ceased to be pleasant for him; he would rather die! And the Psalmist said, 'That was just like *me*!' But after a little the new food became palatable, he ceased to cry and be angry, or grieved; he became content, and found that somebody had been wise and good to him. And the Psalmist said, 'That is just like *me*!' 'My soul is even as that weaned child.' He is content both with what God takes away and with what He gives in place of it.

Weaned from What?

As he thought a little longer about it, he asked himself, What have I been weaned from? It was a test question to see whether he had been right, and also what it meant. And he found that he had been weaned (1) from pride and vanity, which formerly had a large part in his heart; (2) next from self, including self-confidence, and a certainty that he was always, or at least *generally*, right, which was strange, considering that other people were so generally wrong; (3) he was weaned from the things which he had formerly sought as the objects of his life, and now did not care about them, but sought other things altogether; and (4) he was weaned from the old exclusiveness, and taught that he was one of God's own people, bound to them in a closer brotherhood, and must seek their good almost as much as his own!

And being weaned from these things, what had he got now to live upon in their place? He had GOD! What! only God? And he was CONTENT! Is that very strange?

Hope.

3. The third thing he had been taught that day was *something for the Future*. It was 'hope.'

But he was only one of many—'Let Israel hope!' That will cover me, and it will satisfy me. 'Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and for ever!' From 'now'; from to-day. He does not say what he hopes *for*; indeed, he does not know. That word '*for ever*' must have been a very strange and dark one for him. After Death? Yes; he did not know much—I think he knew very little. We ourselves even yet do not know very much, if we go into details. But it is 'in the Lord,' and the 'weaned child' is Content! Are we? Psalm cxxxi.

PSALM CXXXII

1. Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions:
2. How he sware unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob;
3. Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed;
4. I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids,
5. Until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.
6. Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood.
7. We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool.
8. Arise, O Lord, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength.
9. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy.
10. For thy servant David's sake turn not away the face of thine anointed.
11. The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David: he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.
12. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.
13. For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation.
14. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.
15. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread.
16. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.
17. There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed.
18. His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish.

PSALM CXXXII

DAVID'S OATH, AND GOD'S

Psalm cxxxii.

HERE is a Pilgrim Psalm, quite distinct from all the others. It is a Prayer that God would 'remember His Covenant' (the very language of Lev. xxvi. 45), and therefore a promise, the conditions of which, the Psalmist says, have been fulfilled. And then the detail is given of all that he has been meditating upon—of trouble and need, and of blessed memories, which he beseeches God to look upon. What is very marked in the Psalm I have called attention to in the title, that it gathers itself round two oaths, one made by David, and one graciously spoken by Jehovah. The Psalm could not well be written by David himself, but the suggestion is not without considerable weight that its author was Solomon, in loving remembrance of his father.

Oath of David.

David's vow, which he solemnised by an oath, was that he would not sleep again till he had taken steps to build a Habitation for the Ark of Jehovah. Two or three events in David's story are here combined. The restoration of the Ark by the Philistines, when it was brought to Ephratah, near Kirjath-Jearim, 'the city of the field of the wood'; the journey to Jerusalem, when Uzzah was smitten for touching the Ark; the bringing it up from the

Psalm cxxxii.

house of Obed-Edom after the six months of its blessing there; and the proposal of the king, hastily accepted by Nathan, to 'build an house' for Jehovah, the God of Jacob—all these are embraced in the view and words of the Psalmist here. The painful incidents are passed without notice, save as covered by the 'afflictions,' the *humiliation*, the *bad times* of David. God is asked not to forget these, but to remember them in mercy, forgiving and compassionating His servant; and to remember also how the solemn vow of David had been carried out by his son Solomon, who had built in Zion the Great Temple to the Holy One of Israel. The very words in which Solomon consecrated his building are embodied here, and make a part of the Psalm. 'Arise, O Jehovah, into Thy rest, Thou and the Ark of Thy strength: let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness, and let Thy saints shout for joy. For Thy servant David's sake, turn not away the face of Thine Anointed' (vers. 8-10; 2 Chron. vi. 41, 42).

The Christ.

Such is the Oath of David, and such the prayer of the Psalmist that it be remembered of God. But there are many things here not lying on the surface to show that the Inspiring Spirit was referring to much more, and filling the verses with a Messianic sense. The place emphasised in the sixth verse, *Ephratah*, is the burial-place of Rachel, close to Bethlehem; the '*field of the wood*' is the word used in the Book of Ruth (i. 6) for the *land* of Boaz; '*we found it*' is in the Greek the word used by the Angels to the Shepherds when directing them to the manger, and by the Evangelist to describe the result;

and the prayer (in ver. 10) stands in the Greek of the Septuagint, 'the face of *Thy Christ.*' As one commentator has truly remarked, the seventh verse of the Psalm is almost literally the source of the well-known Christmas hymn—'O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.' Psalm cxxxii.

The Oath of Jehovah.

The second part of the Psalm contains a solemn Oath of Jehovah (ver. 11), on which it founds the prayer and pleading for Covenant mercy. It begins with the remarkable Promise of 2 Sam. vii. 12-16, where God promises to David that his 'seed should continue for ever,' and should occupy his throne. Very strikingly there is added here the condition attached to the promise, 'IF thy children shall keep My Covenant' (ver. 12).

It is the repetition of the solemn words of Leviticus (xxvi). It gives the positive side of the assurance; but it does not add the negative. It implies it without describing it. But it rejoices in the promise, and in its conditions; and it embraces, without detail, the closing portions of the Levitical assurance (xxvi. 40-45), that God will 'remember His Covenant,' and be their God, and bless them with an everlasting Blessing.

Messianic.

And here too, as in the previous part of the Psalm, we have the Messianic reference breaking through, as it were, the crust of the Historical—'Jehovah hath chosen Zion: this is my Rest for ever' (ver. 13). And there follows a string of spiritual promises which have ever been most blessed to Israel and to us. 'Provision' is promised to God's people; 'abundantly,' both in the sense that it is *sure,*

Psalm cxxxii.

and that it is plenteous and even overflowing; they shall have 'life, and have it more abundantly.' Her 'poor,' in spirit and in means, shall have 'bread,' including the Bread of Life. Her priests shall be 'clothed with Salvation' (ver. 16); in beautiful contrast with the prayer of ver. 9, which asked that they might be 'clothed with Righteousness.' The Psalmist asks that the priests might be righteous persons, and that their character might so clothe them in the sight of all: but Jehovah promises something better, that they shall be clothed with Salvation, which is the Righteousness of God, and the Sanctification of the Spirit, and which shall, in the sight of all, show forth, *not* their own Righteousness, but that of God! Then shall the Saints of Zion 'shout for joy' (ver. 16).

Then God promises—observe what comes here to the front!—that 'the Horn of David shall branch forth.' Zacharias, the father of the Baptist, caught hold of the meaning (Luke i. 69), and he applies it to the Coming of The Christ. 'Turn not back the face of Thine Anointed,' the Psalmist asks in ver. 10: 'I have prepared a lamp' (a *light*, a *candle*, a *sacred lamp* as of the Temple) 'for My Anointed' (*My Christ*, is the Sept. Greek). That is the answer of Jehovah to His servant's prayer.

PSALM CXXXIII

1. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!
2. It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;
3. As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

PSALM CXXXIII

ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS

Psalm cxxxiii.

THE subject of our Psalm is *Christian Unity*, and it is illustrated by two images, the one from Jewish history and the other from the scenery of Palestine.

All One in Christ.

'How good and pleasant it is for those who are brothers to dwell together in Unity!' 'Behold,' and see it, here in Jerusalem! It is a thing to be desired and observed by all, who are brothers, all children of Abraham; and it is a 'pleasant' thing, one of the delights of a holy life. There are many even in these days of division who can testify to it!

The Oil.

The two images which illustrate the Blessings of Unity are now given us. The first is this Sacred 'Oil,' unfortunately translated 'Ointment'; and this is only one of the painful mistakes about this image, which has done much to spoil the Psalm in our language. 'Ointment' could not run down the beard until it was melted by heat, and so became something like 'oil.' The oil is described in Exodus xxx. 22-32. It was 'a holy anointing oil,' of which 'olive oil' was the basis, with several sweet spices added. The Ark and various parts of the Tabernacle were to be touched with it, and it was to be 'poured' on the head of Aaron, the High-priest, and his successors, and also on the head of each king as he

succeeded to the throne. 'It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments' (ver. 2). So the verse runs in A.V. Unfortunately! If people thought of what they read in the Bible, they would have seen that 'ointment' does not run; and that if it could run down to the skirts of the High-priest's garment, the robe of the ephod would be hopelessly stained with grease and dirt. What could be less like the image of purity as well as fragrance given us in the Book of Moses, in the clothing of the priests? The R.V. has pointed out the true meaning, though only in the margin. There are two Hebrew words, one of which means the *collar* or upper *hem* of the coat, and the other the skirts. These are markedly distinguished, the one from the other, in Exod. xxviii. 32, 33, where the one, *peh*, means the hem round the hole made in the ephod for the head to pass through; and the other, *shool*, the skirts on which the golden pomegranates were to hang. It is the former word, *peh*, which is used in this Psalm: and the meaning is that the fragrant 'oil' was poured on the head of Aaron, that it trickled down the long beard, and so touched the hem of the garment which was round his neck. Indeed, Delitzsch maintains that it is not the oil which flows down, but the beard which reaches down to the neck of the ephod! No filthiness then, or grease upon the holy garment. But a perfume which spread around the High-priest, and announced his presence, even before he could be seen.

Psalm cxxxiii.

The Skirt of his Garments.

Psalm cxxxiii.

And so, says the Psalmist, is it with the priests and people of God when they 'dwell together in unity.' The oil of the Spirit of God is upon them. They have been 'anointed with fresh oil.' Something which cannot be seen, but is *felt* when they are near. A sweetness of touch, and tone, and purity which communicates itself to all who are near. It is one of the blessings of being 'one in Christ.' It is one of the things sure to follow when the Lord's own prayer of intercession for His people is heard, 'that they all may be one' (Jno. xvii. 21); 'one in us'; 'even AS WE ARE ONE' (vers. 21, 22).

The Dew of Hermon.

The second image in this Psalm is 'As the Dew of Hermon, that cometh upon the Mountains of Zion' (ver. 3). The 'Dew,' or *Night-Mist*, that falleth upon Hermon. It is not *Dew* in our sense of the word. Mr Neill, in his *Palestine Explored*,[1] compares it to 'the lightest form of Scotch mist, but it never occurs in the daytime, but only forms during the night.' He tells us that the night-mist often soaks a garment, as when Gideon's fleece was 'full of water.' It falls, he says, 'chiefly in the autumn, more largely in September than in any other month,' which embraces the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles, a fact which explains why it should hold a place in this Pilgrim Psalm. We learn elsewhere that this night-mist is specially full and strong on Mount Hermon, one of the spurs of which is called *The Father of Dew*. Mr Neill says that even in Zion (*'the Arid'*) he has seen the night-mist

[1] See *Palestine Explored*, by Rev. J. Neill. London: Nisbet & Co. Chapter v., 'The Night-Mist.'

often rise in white billowy clouds, with 'dense masses of vapour.' So much for the explanation of the image of the Dew. But what does the dew *do*? In what lies its blessing for Palestine? In Fruitfulness. But for it the dry land and burning sun of Palestine might destroy the fruits of the earth. And *this* is what the unity of the people of God does. It refreshes them. It gives fruitfulness. So that here is the double lesson of this short but very suggestive Psalm. Behold! when those, who are brothers in Christ, dwell together in unity, how good it is, and how pleasant! Their fragrance is as the Anointing Oil on the head of Aaron. Their fruit is as when the night-mist has blessed the Holy Land! Psalm cxxxiii. The Blessing.

There, under such conditions, Jehovah has 'commanded the Blessing' often, in the past, and will do so again and yet again. What Blessing? 'Even Life for evermore.' 'All one in Christ Jesus!' And all, a living family, who never know Death, but live for ever with the Lord!

PSALM CXXXIV

1. Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord.
2. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord.
3. The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.

PSALM CXXXIV

A SONG IN THE NIGHT

Psalm cxxxiv.

THIS is the last of the Songs of Degrees; and it is a most suitable song for such a place. The pilgrims are standing in the Temple Court. They have poured out their hearts in many Psalms; they are joyful in the House of Prayer. They have found it good to be there. And they are soon to leave. But others have an even better lot than they. There are some whose life-work is to dwell in the House of God, and to lead there the worship of His people. Blessed are they whose life is spent in the service of God, whose daily work is the attending God's House and serving Him! Do not many of us know it as the most honourable, and often the most joyful business of life? God's servants! Who could desire a better master? or a more blessed calling?

Day and Night in the Temple.

But the Psalmist has found in Zion some of God's priests who are engaged not by day, but 'by night' in the House of Jehovah. The explanation is to be found in two passages of the Old Testament. In Lev. viii. 35, the sons of Aaron having been consecrated, had a special charge for one week of service. 'At the Door of the Tent of Meeting shall ye abide day and night seven days, and shall keep the charge of Jehovah' (Am. R.V. and in

Psalm cxxxiv.

1 Chron. ix. 33). 'These are the singers, heads of fathers' houses of the Levites, who dwelt in the chambers, and were free from other service, for they were employed in their work *day and night* . . . throughout their generations, chief men' (Am. R.V.). These then are the men addressed in this Psalm, who by turn kept the Temple Service continually. The fire on the altar was never to go out. The service of prayer and song, the fire in the heart, was continual. Some there were on Night Duty, and these were the envy of the Psalmist.

God always and God only.

Then note how constantly the Name of God appears in the Psalm, and What Name. 'Behold!' Again the word which specially calls for attention: listen, and look, for here is something worthy of being known. 'Behold! Bless ye Jehovah: all ye servants of Jehovah, which by night stand in the House of Jehovah' (ver. 1). And the name appears twice more in the Psalm, once in each of the two following verses. As if there were a music in the Name, which the heart was never tired of sounding, or of hearing! God! God! God!

Joyful.

Note again that the 'all-night service' was a joyful one. It was singing, singing, all the time. Not a burden Not a long dreary duty. Not a necessity which would have been escaped if possible. The men were to be envied by the Pilgrims and the Psalmist. Oh to have a life and opportunities such as theirs!

Three Blessings.

Then note the wonderful and unexpected turn which the Psalm takes. Twice it urges on the priests to bless Jehovah. 'Bless ye Jehovah'

(ver. 1). 'Lift up your hands and bless Jehovah' (ver. 2). But *then*, '*Jehovah bless* THEE!' You have been thinking of nothing else than of offering praise and blessing the Lord, but, lo! your prayers and praises have all fallen back again upon your own heads. You only thought to give, and here it is your lot to get! You never thought of this, for that would have spoiled it all; it would not have been real prayer or praise: but God saw, and God has sent! And *you* are filled with the blessing now! What a wonderful turn, and how truly the Psalmist understood! Psalm cxxxiv.

Then what a reminder we have in the last verse. Did you quite think what you were doing? Whom you were speaking to, when you sang and prayed? Perhaps for the moment you forgot something? Was it the greatness of Jehovah? Well, you will not forget it when the answer comes. The blessing brings the thought. He is 'the Maker of Heaven and Earth!' And He is blessing thee! Note how the plural of the first two verses, 'all ye' and 'ye' has been changed into the singular '*thee.*' A very personal thing this! Not a general blessing for the whole choir! But for each man. A separate blessing! As if you and Jehovah were alone! The Maker of Heaven and Earth made thee; and He knows thee, and He blesses thee! The Creator.

And then mark again that this blessing comes 'out of Zion.' It is something special. Was it worth while coming up all this way from home on pilgrimage to the Feast? Might we not have got the same thing at home? Was not Jehovah also there? Ah! Out of Zion.

Psalm cxxxiv.

does any one think so? Not one who has been blessed. It was God's Feast to which you came. It was at God's invitation you approached. You saw and found these priests all night in the House. You saw them joyful, and you joined in their Psalms and Prayers. There was a special blessing given you for the journey, and for the obedience, and for your part in the worship. It is 'out of Zion' that it came to you. And this is the last word in the 'Songs of Degrees' for the pilgrim who has come up to 'Zion'!

PSALM CXXXV

1. Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the name of the Lord ; praise him, O ye servants of the Lord.
2. Ye that stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God,
3. Praise the Lord ; for the Lord is good : sing praises unto his name ; for it is pleasant.
4. For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure.
5. For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.
6. Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.
7. He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth ; he maketh lightnings for the rain ; he bringeth the wind out of his treasuries.
8. Who smote the first-born of Egypt, both of man and beast.
9. Who sent tokens and wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants.
10. Who smote great nations, and slew mighty kings ;
11. Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan :
12. And gave their land for an heritage, an heritage unto Israel his people.
13. Thy name, O Lord, endureth for ever ; and thy memorial, O Lord, throughout all generations.
14. For the Lord will judge his people, and he will repent himself concerning his servants.
15. The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.
16. They have mouths, but they speak not ; eyes have they, but they see not ;
17. They have ears, but they hear not ; neither is there any breath in their mouths.
18. They that make them are like unto them : so is every one that trusteth in them.
19. Bless the Lord, O house of Israel : bless the Lord, O house of Aaron :
20. Bless the Lord, O house of Levi : ye that fear the Lord, bless the Lord.
21. Blessed be the Lord out of Zion, which dwelleth at Jerusalem. Praise ye the Lord.

PSALM CXXXV

THE PRIESTS' PRAISE

Psalm cxxxv.

THIS is a very composite Psalm, eight of its twenty-one verses being taken from Ps. cxv., and other parts being nearly identical with verses in Ps. cxxxvi. and other parts of Scripture. Its place here is due to its echo (ver. 2) of the preceding call on the priests who stand all night in the House of Jehovah. It is a Hallelu-Jah Psalm, in two parts, one of which offers praise because of God's greatness and glory, and the other repeats the scorn of Idols found in a previous Psalm.

Praise to Jehovah.

How hearty is the outburst of praise with which it begins, the overflowing of a full soul! I count eleven calls to praise in the Psalm, as if the Psalmist could not refrain from shouting aloud in his joy; yet there is no feeling of painful iteration, because it is so natural and so hearty. It is specially from the *priests* that he asks for praise: the priests whose whole lives are devoted to God's service, whose sole business is to lead the worship of Jehovah. The call is not only for public but also for *personal* praise of God, that they themselves should do what they are pleading with others to do. How needful for us still is this call! The ministers of God need them-

selves to live near Him. It is a need too much forgotten. The pastors have no pastor to watch for them. It is no man's business to seek the good of my soul while I am caring for the souls of others. So here the Psalmist cares. He is speaking to me. He is calling on me to praise Jehovah. Psalm cxxxv.

One reason for praise is the greatness of the Lord. In a verse (ver. 6) which has already appeared in another Psalm (Ps. cxv. 3), but which appeals to him so much that he repeats it, '*Whatsoever Jehovah pleased, that did He*, in Heaven, and in Earth, in the Seas, and in *the abyss*.' It is the Omnipotence of God, as seen in Creation, in the great and in the small, by land and by sea. In everything we may see God, as this man does. Not a drop of vapour rises in the evening mist but God has raised it; not a shower has fallen from the thunder-cloud but God has sent it; not a storm has burst over the ocean but God had ordered it, out of the treasury of the winds. How near this man was living to God; how many voices he heard telling of God! Why should I Praise?

But he has another reason to give. He is bearing in mind the great things done for Israel. The Nation was 'the chosen' of Jehovah; His 'peculiar Treasure.' God had proved this by His Messenger, His Interpositions, His Miracles. His Wonders in Egypt called for praise, especially the awful destruction of the First-born, that testified to His care for Israel. 'O Egypt,' thou didst learn that lesson on the awful night of Exodus! And no nation was so great, and no king so strong, as to be able to stand against God's people. Sihon, and Og, and all Again, Why?

Psalm cxxxv.

the kings of Cainan: they had been swept away as by a torrent, in the greatness and mercy of Jehovah!

The Idols.

And then the Idols of these nations! They had no power to protect their votaries, and their own pretensions had been exposed to the ridicule of all. The words of a previous Psalm are repeated and endorsed. Among these one memorable saying appears: 'They that make them are like unto them' (ver. 18). The makers of the Idols are as powerless and foolish as the stones and stocks which they make! What we worship is the height of our own aim. We cannot rise higher than that. It is our ideal, and more. We may not reach so high, but we often fall as low. And as regards many of the Heathen Idols there is morally no lower depth to which a man can descend. But let us hear the Psalmist—'HALLELU-JAH!'

PSALM CXXXVI

1. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.
2. O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever.
3. O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever.
4. To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever.
5. To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever.
6. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever.
7. To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever:
8. The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever:
9. The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.
10. To him that smote Egypt in their first-born: for his mercy endureth for ever:
11. And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever:
12. With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever.
13. To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever:
14. And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever:
15. But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever.
16. To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever.
17. To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:
18. And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:
19. Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever:
20. And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever:
21. And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever:

22. Even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever.
23. Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever:
24. And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever.
25. Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever.
26. O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever.

PSALM CXXXVI

THE GREAT HALLEL

THE title which I have offered for this Psalm is one given it long ago by the Jews, although there was a whole group of Psalms, as already noticed, called by the name. And it expresses their sense of its specially outstanding burst of Praise. Psalm cxxxvi.

Many of its verses are found in other Psalms, chiefly in 1 Chron. xvi. 34, used at the foundation of Solomon's Temple; 2 Chron. xx. 21, the song sung over the victory of King Jehosaphat; and Ezra iii. 11, at the foundation of the Second Temple. Each of its 26 verses contains a chorus, answering to the statements made. The chorus is, 'For His mercy endureth for ever.'

The four Divisions of the Psalm are marked. They follow the lines of the previous Psalm (cxxxv.), but there is sufficient difference for us to mark them, though we may not dwell on their teaching. The first Division calls for praise because of what God *is*. One commentator (the late Dr Andrew Bonar) distinguishes between them thus,—that the former Psalm dwells on God's 'glory,' while this Psalm dwells on His 'love.' And it is so in fact, though the word *love* does not appear, but 'mercy' and 'goodness.' Division I.

The second Division calls for praise to Jehovah Division II.

Psalm cxxxvi. as *The Creator*. The wonders of Creation—His Wisdom—as seen in the Heavens, in the Stars, in Astronomy! And the word 'alone' (ver. 4) greatly increases what we may call the volume of praise. He had no helper! No adviser! No other mind or arm was concerned in it! And we remember what the New Testament contributes to our knowledge of this. It was done by 'The Word,' 'all things were made by HIM, and without HIM was not anything made that was made'!

Division III. *God in the Story of Israel* is the subject of the third Division of the Psalm. The 'Smiting of Egypt,' the Exodus, the Red Sea cut in two, the overthrow of Pharaoh and his host, the slaughter of famous kings, Sihon and Og, and the gift of their land for 'an heritage unto Israel, His servant'—these are the memories for which the grateful heart of the Psalmist makes room.

Division IV. In the concluding Division there is something which touches us nearly. It begins in ver. 23 and continues to the close. A distinction is silently made between 'Israel' and 'us.' Not that we are *out* of Israel; but that we are now parts of the true Israel, which cannot be forgotten, and which cannot be silent. 'Who remembered US'—and that when we were in 'our low estate.' From the great things of Creation and History, the Psalm comes down to the small things of our family, our estate, our selves. And it shows no sense of condescension, no thought of the wonderful difference. It is the same lesson which the Lord Himself taught, 'A sparrow falleth not to the ground without your Father,' for it is the

same as Science (no usual friend of faith, it is supposed!) teaches, when we exchange the use of the telescope for that of the microscope, and examine the eye of a fly! Yes! yes! 'He remembered us.' He 'hath redeemed us' (ver. 24); He 'giveth food to all flesh' (ver. 25). Hence for this also, for this crowning reason indeed, that *we* are included, that *we* are meant, that *we* are commanded to do it, that *our* praise is worth God's listening to—*we* will 'give thanks unto the God of Heaven, for His mercy endureth for ever'! Psalm cxxxvi.

PSALM CXXXVII

1. By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.
2. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.
3. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
4. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?
5. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.
6. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.
7. Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.
8. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.
9. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

PSALM CXXXVII

MOTHER DEAR, JERUSALEM

Psalm cxxxvii. Captivity—from Within.

HERE we have probably the one Biblical glimpse of the Babylonian Captivity *from the inside.* There is much upon the subject to be found elsewhere, but nothing that shows us the people in captivity; how they were occupied, how they felt. Here is a group of priests, or Levites, sitting down, resting from labour, on the banks of a canal near the great Eastern city. They are in the company of natives, who speak to them in a friendly way, but ask what must give much pain. The Jews were known as a musical people, both with instruments and in song; but apparently it was sacred music only for which they were famous. And so they were asked to sing one of their beautiful songs, one of 'the Songs of Zion.' The Lord's Song, a Psalm of Worship, to which the Courts of the Temple had rung an echo, to be sung for the amusement of the Heathen in Babylon! And so to be sung by the priest or Levite, who had often sung it in Zion! Could the heathen neighbours ever guess what that meant? Think of it! 'Mount Zion stands most beautiful!' 'The Lord bless thee, out of Zion!' 'The Lord loveth the gates of Zion!' 'I will enter into them, I will bless the Lord!'—Ah! they knew

Psalm cxxxvii.

not that such songs, and such memories, would break the heart. The only answer was a burst of tears (ver. 1): 'O Jerusalem! if I forget thee, may my right hand forget.' Never let me sing, never let me play again! Dear Jerusalem! Dearer than ever now: dearer than my chief joy! The chord of memory, struck by the stranger's request, was the deepest chord of all the heart's music. To them, Jerusalem meant GOD; and the remembrance of the Psalms of the Temple brought them nearer God than aught else. And their confidence in God's care, God's power, God's defence, was shaken to its root as they looked out upon Babylon and remembered Jerusalem!

Zion Destroyed.

Jerusalem was in ruins! The Temple burnt! The most Holy Place trodden under foot of wild beasts! The Arab of the desert camped there! And the wolf took shelter there. Yes, and old neighbours, descendants of Isaac like themselves, had taken part, and had rejoiced to see it done. But what said the prophet? Had not Obadiah foretold God's wrath on Edom, the guilty one, guiltier than even the stranger? 'For thy violence against thy brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever.... Thou shouldest not have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance, neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway to cut off those of his that did escape' (Obad. vers. 10, 13, 14, 15). To-day, Judah remembered the words of the prophet, as well as the songs which they could not sing.

Psalm cxxxvii. Babylon's Fate.

And ah, Babylon too! Did they think that she would escape? that God would not remember? that Israel was always to be trodden down? No, no, God had promised; God would not forsake His own. For Babylon too there was a cup of wrath and ruin in store. We can see thy future! Thou shalt one day be surrounded by enemies, who shall dry up thy rivers, and swarm over thy battlements, and spare neither man nor woman; fiendish men, who shall rejoice to wreak their cruelty on thee, and shall laugh at the cries of the children whose lives are dashed out against the stones! Where shalt thou find consolation in that day? None of thine idols shall help thee then!

Such was the bitterness of these early days. The memories of the Past were helping them now, the tears they shed were from hearts softened by sorrow. The only comfort they knew was in God, and in His promised help. Just where we find it now. For sometimes we too are almost in despair. The cup of bitterness is sometimes ours also. But God is ours, and God's Word. The Future is His and ours. Judgment is before us, and Eternity. But we know our Judge and His Name: and Eternity means, to be at Home with Him.

PSALM CXXXVIII

1. I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee.

2. I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

3. In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.

4. All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord, when they hear the words of thy mouth.

5. Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord: for great is the glory of the Lord.

6. Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.

7. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me.

8. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.

PSALM CXXXVIII

TESTIMONY FOR GOD

Psalm cxxxviii.

It is partly the place in which it is found that gives this Psalm its remarkable force as a testimony for God. We have not got the impression of the last Psalm quite effaced. The tears of Babylon are still traceable on the face of the exile, even after he has returned. The silence in which no song rises in the strange land is broken by the loud peal of joyous praise here, so unexpectedly, that we take a little time to know where we are.

No Name.

1. Observe how striking the absence of any Name for God in the opening verses. Seven utterances of praise and four verses before anyone is named. 'Thou,' 'Thee,' 'Thy' are esteemed enough, as if no one could doubt Who was meant. Speaking to one who is present with us, we do not always think it needful to name him! And then following hard after each other, *four times*, it is Jehovah, Jehovah, Jehovah, Jehovah! None of which is calculated, or perhaps even observed. The heart is speaking as it will!

Other Gods

2. Note next the Defiance openly offered to all the other gods, the Idols of the Nations. As if the writer saw them gathered together in a Pantheon like that of Rome, and threw down his gauntlet

Psalm cxxxviii.

before them all. 'Before the gods will I sing praise unto Thee!' For which he gives three reasons, as if to show that he knows and weighs well what he is doing. 'Thy *Holy* Temple'—emphasise the adjective, and remember, if you can and dare, what contrast he may intend between God's House and many Idol Temples! To this reason he adds other two—God's Love, and God's Truth (vers. 1, 2).

Word above the Name.

3. Dwell for a moment in passing on the strange declaration that 'Thou hast magnified Thy Word above all Thy Name' (ver. 2). What does it mean? Is it not a *Word of Promise* which has been given and has (ver. 3) been *performed*? All the Attributes of God are precious to us, but we may look at them, as it were, from a distance; but a promise, which we have made ours by trusting it, and which has come true,—how near it brings God to us! And how perfectly expression is given to this by saying that we have been 'strengthened by strength in our soul' (ver. 3).

All Kings.

4. The knowledge of Jehovah is to come to all peoples. 'All the Kings of the Earth' (all the greatest men of might and authority) 'shall praise Thee, O Jehovah' (by that very name!). And the condition of their doing so is 'when they hear the words of Thy mouth' (ver. 4). Not merely when they have before them the Revealed Word, but when they have internal evidence of its truth, and hear for themselves Thy voice! Yes, then 'they shall sing in the ways of Jehovah, for great is the glory of Jehovah' (ver. 5).

5. But how shall *we* deal with so great a God? Is He not too great and awful a Being for us to venture to take up His Name upon our lips? Ah! His very greatness has destroyed the gap between us and the great of the earth! Heaven is too far away to show any difference between the king's robe and the beggar's cloak. Great and small seem alike to Him. Again the Psalmist anticipates the Saviour—Jehovah has 'respect unto the lowly,' and He 'seeth the proud afar off' (ver. 6). Psalm cxxxviii. The Lowly.

6. But may I not again be in difficulties, as I have been? Yes, even worse than before: 'I may walk in the midst of trouble' (ver. 7). It is a strong word; it recalls to us the 23rd Psalm, or Daniel cast into the den, or Jeremiah in his hard and difficult career. What then? Thy Hand is all that is needed! It is terrible to 'mine enemies,' but it 'saves me.' My Troubles.

7. For 'Thou will perfect that which concerneth me: Thou wilt not forsake the works of Thy own Hands' (ver. 8). The work is that of preparing and perfecting *me*! God will not cease from that. He who hath begun the good work in me will perfect it until the Day of Jesus Christ' (Phil. i. 6, R.V.). Wherefore we say, 'Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever,' and we will praise Thy Name for evermore!

PSALM CXXXIX

1. O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.
2. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising, thou understandest my thought afar off.
3. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.
4. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.
5. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.
6. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.
7. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
8. If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.
9. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
10. Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.
11. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.
12. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.
13. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.
14. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.
15. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
16. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.
17. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!
18. If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.
19. Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men.

20. For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain.
21. Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?
22. I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies.
23. Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:
24. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

PSALM CXXXIX

THE TWO SEARCHINGS OF HEART

Psalm cxxxix.

In some respects this is one of the most remarkable of all the Psalms. Canon Cheyne calls it (1905) 'the most sublime of all.' Its author and origin unknown, or at least uncertain, it is almost independent of either, standing on ground common to all men, and as applicable in these later days as when first written. It has no local colouring. God everywhere, and concerned in all things and all men; God coming closer to us than we can come to ourselves; God the Ruler and the Judge of all—He is set forth here in ever memorable words.

Its Component Parts.

The simplest, as it is the most comprehensive division of the Psalm, seems to me to be twofold. A Searching of the Heart by God, which is in the Past (vers. 1-22); and a second (vers. 23, 24) which is, at least partially, yet to come. The former is dwelt on at some length, entering into many details: the latter has an importance of its own.

Part I.

'O Jehovah, Thou hast searched and known me!' So begins the Psalm, entering at once into the centre of its subject. The 'Searching' embraces the deep exercise of soul which forms part of what we

call 'Conversion.' It is part of the pangs of the New Birth of the man. Of varied depth and intensity in different cases, all God's children pass through it. Psalm cxxxix.

We are here taught how far it goes. Evening and Morning, our 'Down-sitting,' and our 'Up-rising,' are all opened up to the view of God, Our 'thoughts' (ver. 2), habits, ways, even in the dead of night; our words, our imaginations, our projects, half-formed as they are, all known and seen (vers. 3, 4). My past, 'behind' me; my future, 'before' me, have been 'beset'; and I have been as a besieged city, into which nothing goes, and out of which nothing passes, without being known and taken hold of (ver. 5). 'Thy hand has been upon me,' every hour: it is beyond my comprehension, it is overwhelming, but I know it to be true. And I cannot escape, though I seem to have tried. I have been in unknown regions, in the Desert, on the Sea; but everywhere, in Heaven, in Hell, by Day, by Night, there is no hiding from Thee, O God! All my Past, even before birth, and ever after it, I have been with Thee! Thou didst create and fashion me,—Thou! giving a Soul and a Conscience able to understand, and see what sin is, and what Thou art! In Thy Book all was written, and Thou canst see it there! (vers. 13-16). The very Darkness shines about me, as Thou lookest down! How far it goes!

And what, O God! shall I say of Thy knowledge? Is it too awful to bear? Once, and for an hour, I thought that it might be so! But I have learned, I have been taught the truth. These Thy 'thoughts' Awful? or Precious?

Psalm cxxxix.

of me are precious beyond any words of mine! Every day, every hour, nay every moment as the pulse beats, Thou hast thought of me! The grains of sand on the seashore are not so many as Thy thoughts of me! Even as I sleep, Thou art beholding; I awake to meet Thine eye! (vers. 17, 18).

The Result.

And what has come to me through this heart-searching of Thine? An awful sense of sin; of what sin is; of what my sin has been! I have seen and hated sin, and know what it must end in, since Thou art Judge! I set my face to Thee in holy fear, and humble trust, and against Thine enemies, which are mine!

Part II.

Thou knowest, O God, the Heart Searcher, what my past has been, and what a change has come within me! But I have still life before me, and duty, and the possibility of grace. I am Thine own; but I am not what I should be and what I may be. So that I come to ask for something more.

A Second Searching.

Though I know well what it is to have Thee searching my heart, I also know that it is the only way of new advance and progress. Hence, in trembling and fear, I make to-day my petition, 'Search me, O God!' Search me again; Search me NOW!

1. It is my heart which I present, as it is to-day. I cannot live on the Past. It is fresh Manna that I need, day by day. 'Search my *heart*; try *me*; and know my *thoughts*.'

2. The whole sphere of my life I thus present to Thee: my heart, to see what I love; my thoughts, where they go; 'me,' deeper than either; the *ego*, the 'self,' which needs to be slain, and to die.

3. Whatever the result be, Search me again, O God! 'See whether there be *any* Way that is wicked, or painful, or vain, or discontented' (ver. 24). Am I a vessel too filthy to be used of Thee or for Thy people? May I be cleansed? Canst Thou do it for me? And *wilt Thou*, notwithstanding all Thou seest, and my unworthiness? I put myself (awful thought! make it *real*, O God!) into Thy hands, to be dealt with, and so cleansed. And so 'lead me in the way everlasting' (ver. 24). Psalm cxxxix.

4. The need for it, Thou seest! And what I seek is, that I may myself advance in Holiness to do Thy work and to glorify Thee! For well I know that such searching and such purifying is God's way of making me to grow in grace.

PSALM CXL

1. Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man;
2. Which imagine mischiefs in their heart; continually are they gathered together for war.
3. They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders poison is under their lips. Selah.
4. Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have purposed to overthrow my goings.
5. The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me. Selah.
6. I said unto the Lord, Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O Lord.
7. O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.
8. Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked: further not his wicked device; lest they exalt themselves. Selah.
9. As for the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them.
10. Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again.
11. Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him.
12. I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.
13. Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence.

PSALM CXL

A CRY OF DISTRESS

Psalm cxl.

THIS Psalm is the first of a group of five standing together, and ascribed to David. There is a strong likeness, a family likeness, in them all; they bring before us persecutions and troubles; and even in the sudden cries to God for protection and mercy the language is strangely like.

The Attacks, vers. 1-5.

The first five verses of the Psalm deal with attacks made upon the writer, which he has felt to be severe and full of danger. Two classes of men are before him, and each class has its own method of attack. The one class is that of the slanderer, whose method is by lies. The singular is employed, as if some one had been prominent. 'They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent' (for he slides into the plural, as if the leader had several to go with him!); 'adders' poison is under their lips' (ver. 3). Selah! *Think of that!* Think of a man emulating the Serpent that we read of in the Garden, to slander God and man; and think of the lips that were made to praise the Almighty secreting poison like the adder!

Hands also.

But there were other enemies who attacked him besides the slanderers. The 'hands of the wicked were raised against him,' and the 'violent man'

Psalm cxl.

sought to overthrow him. Do we understand what is meant by the 'violent man,' who is frequently referred to in the Old Testament? It is worth pausing over; for it is a very dangerous feature in a man's character, very distinctive, and often unsuspected by the man himself. The strong character is disposed most readily to it; but often the man of weak will is a man of strong passions, of which violence is a ready mark. Many of the crimes which shake the fabric of Society are the outcome of such 'violence.' Such then are the enemies to which the Psalmist, David or another, had been exposed. All sorts of tricks and ambushes had been laid to entrap him: a 'snare,' 'cords,' a 'net,' and 'gins,' had been set for him. 'Selah! *Think of that.*' What danger he was in! How determined they were to ruin him!

God is his Defence.

It is to God he turns, with what reality, what meaning, what confidence! 'O Jehovah! God!' From vers. 6-8 we have his prayer, 'My God!' See what God is to him; and what God has done for him! He is 'the strength of my salvation.' *My strong Saviour!* The very heart, essence, and strength of the salvation which is sure. And Jehovah has proved that in the past. 'Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle' (ver. 7)—either as a 'Shield' held over me; or as a Helmet placed on my head for defence. I have proved it: I know it, and I know Him! These evil men cannot injure a hair of my head, save by Jehovah's permission: and that Thou wilt not give! Thou wilt not answer any requests they may make, Thou wilt not

grant their desire, for they would only 'exalt themselves' against Thee! 'Selah! *Think of that!*' Nay, upon their heads, I know that their own devices will recoil; burning coals of fire; seeking to hurt another, they only bring these down upon themselves! (ver. 10). The violent man will himself be hunted, and the evil speaker be exposed (ver. 11). Psalm cxl.

I know Jehovah! He 'will maintain the cause of the afflicted and the poor.' 'Surely,' verily, 'the righteous will give thanks unto Thy Name: the upright shall dwell' (not for a time only!) 'in Thy presence'!

PSALM CXLI

1. Lord, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee.
2. Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.
3. Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.
4. Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties.
5. Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.
6. When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words; for they are sweet.
7. Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth.
8. But mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord: in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute.
9. Keep me from the snares which they have laid for me, and the gins of the workers of iniquity.
10. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, whilst that I withal escape.

PSALM CXLI

THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

Psalm cxli.

This Psalm comes appropriately after the preceding, and it illustrates the arrangement of the Psalms that it does so. In the preceding case the author was exposed to the attacks of slander from evil tongues. Here, he seems to put the question, whether he himself does not sometimes sin with his lips. And the purport of this Psalm is to make confession, and ask to be kept from such sin in time to come. There is no time to be lost; the danger is upon him already.

A Time of Need.

So he begins with importunity—'I cry unto Thee'; 'make haste'; 'give ear to my voice when I cry' (ver. 1). Like many others, the Psalmist found that his secret prayers were better when he uttered them *aloud*, in his own hearing. It gives more definiteness to thought and desire, and puts us into the position of judging ourselves and the truth of what we say. So that often in the Psalms the writer speaks of his 'voice being heard' in solitary prayer. Perhaps without meaning it, he tells us that this was an evening prayer. After the labour of the day, when he has frequently said what he should not have done, he comes to God's footstool. The image comes up before him of that Incense which he has

Psalm cxli.

seen offered up in the golden censer, with its 'sweet savour' before God and man; and his prayer becomes an evening sacrifice. *The Blood* is behind it, to give it acceptance before God. And the petition which he offers is that Jehovah would 'set a watch upon his mouth, and keep the door of his lips' (ver. 2). In one sense we cannot help feeling what a daring prayer that is; what an awful sense it implies of God's being concerned in everything that touches us; and what a confidence in God is wrapt up in the words.

The Heart.

But it is not enough to refrain from evil speaking; and this man, who is so honest with himself, goes on to ask that his 'heart' may also be under the constant dominion of God. He asks that it may be separated from evil, and from evil men; a separation which is at the root of the Old Testament idea of Holiness. May his heart not 'incline' to any evil thing; take away all ill desire; 'cleanse it': what a beautiful petition that is—the washing of the heart clean and pure! And the evil men, though rich and friendly, 'let me not eat of their dainties!'

Reproof.

Yes: and he is led to ask something more, something that is always trying to flesh and blood. He knows that his own frailties often need *reproof*. He needs to have his attention called to them, and to be told of them. And by whom? It is a question whether it is more difficult to accept reproof from those who are better than we are, or from those who are not so good. The former should carry more weight; but the latter often carry more sting! If even *they* are ashamed of our sayings, these must be very bad.

But the reproving words of a 'righteous' man are like oil, soft, and even sweet; and spoken so kindly that it would be a shame to resent them. And if they who reprove me should themselves come thereafter to suffer and to fall, if my 'judges' should be cast out, yet let me not remember their reproof as if it were a wrong. Let me be kind in anything I say, even though the evil has been done to me already, and I am in the midst of the destruction and ruin of what I once possessed. If I have suffered, it has been deserved; let me not rejoice in the evil of others who are suffering also. Such seems to be the meaning of an obscure passage in the Psalm (ver. 7). Psalm cxli.

The writer concludes with a threefold petition. (1) I trust, O Jehovah the Lord, in Thee, taking refuge there — leave me not destitute. Without Thee, I am destitute indeed! (2) Keep me from all snares and gins in time to come: I walk under Thine eye, and in Thy keeping, from hour to hour! (3) Let the nets set for me catch only those who lay them, while those who are looking unto Thee escape them all! Have I not learned that suffering is Thy discipline to make me better, and that, looking back on the troubles of the past, I can thank Thee that they have come? A Concluding Prayer.

PSALM CXLII

1. I cried unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication.
2. I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble.
3. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me.
4. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.
5. I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.
6. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.
7. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.

PSALM CXLII

A SOUL IN PRISON

Psalm cxlii.

THIS is the fifth of the group of Psalms entitled 'Psalms of David' in this closing part of the Psalter. It even claims a special date and scene in his life, when he was hiding from Saul in *the* Cave of Engedi, or of Adullam. As in similar cases, it is not of great consequence to us whether the title be historically accurate or not: all that we deem important is, that we have a correct account of a soul in great trouble, who has set down his experience for our guidance, and has trodden safely the way that some of us also may have to take.

His Cry—Past or Present?

Our first question must be, whether he is here recording a cry and a danger which are past; or whether it is a present trouble heard at the moment of writing? The strange absence of a present tense in the Hebrew verb makes a question like this not uncommon. It is clear that the trouble described did not begin to-day or yesterday; it has been of some duration (vers. 1-4). It is clear, also, that it has not yet passed away. So that practically we find that it is a past trouble which still continues, which engrosses his case, and ours.

The Trouble.

The trouble is described. Like many other prayers of the Psalmist, this is an audible cry: 'with

Psalm cxlii.

my voice,' and again 'with my voice.' A cry and a supplication, pain and prayer. It is a complaint which has been 'poured out' like a river: a trouble which has been 'showed,' as when an invalid bares before the Doctor the seat of his disease. He had been quite overcome by it, 'his spirit overwhelmed' (ver. 3). He had come to the end of self: try as he would he could find no escape, no deliverance. Snares and pitfalls were before and around him: on the 'right hand' there was no one to help; and that God saw as well as himself. He was alone, helpless, friendless. He could see no way out. No refuge. Nay, no man even to sympathise with him or to care for his distress. Every earthly confidence had broken down. Neither wisdom nor strength could help. He was deserted. He was in despair.

The One Resource.

Then his 'spirit' which was overwhelmed, that part of him which had to do with Eternal things, the *ruach*, which was made in God's Image, turned to God, and to God only. It is put into one verse; and it is enough. It is the crisis, the new crisis of his Spirit, meaning everything; but done in a moment, in one decisive act. 'I cried unto Thee, O Jehovah! I said, *Thou* art my refuge, my portion in the land of the living' (ver. 5). It is the Act of Faith, renouncing self, and every other help, satisfied only with leaving all in God's Hands. In ver. 3 he has uttered with extraordinary force and prominence the word 'THOU,' and we must understand that the emphasis is still here unbroken. What he means to say, and to let all know, is, that God is His trust in this awful time,

God only: and that God is enough. And he is content! Psalm cxlii.

So, out of this spiritual crisis, this moment of full surrender of everything to God, he goes on to pray. It is a different sort of prayer that he can offer now, from what he did before. Not, perhaps, in earnestness, or pain, or spiritual agony. But it is the cry of Faith. 'Attend unto my cry: I am brought very low: deliver me: bring my soul out of prison: *that* I may praise thy Name' (ver. 7). It is as if God had come very near to him: that he was so feeble that he could only whisper his prayer; but God was so near that *He* could hear it. Whether it was an actual outward prison, or whether the hiding was in '*the* Cave,' or whether it was the Spiritual confinement and restraint which he so calls,—we know not. But we do know that never prisoner, hopeless of human help, cried more urgently in the Divine ear, or was more surely heard. His Prayer.

'The Righteous shall compass me about: for Thou shalt' (read *wilt* with the Amer. R.V.) 'deal bountifully with me' (ver. 7). The picture rises before us. There were righteous men not far away, though he had not been able to find them in his distress. Men who feared and trusted God; they would hear and know what he had come through. They would know what God would do for him. And it was going to be a great thing. Not a poor answer to his request. Not the bare sparing of l if Not a mere escape by the skin of his teeth. God *was* going to 'deal bountifully with him'! And The Great Expectation.

Psalm cxlii.

righteous men would gather round to see it, to wonder at it, to find in it a new reason to praise and bless and trust Jehovah. And that was true. Are *we* not finding it so to-day, as we read this Psalm ourselves?

PSALM CXLIII

1. Hear my prayer, O Lord, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness.
2. And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.
3. For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead.
4. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate.
5. I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands.
6. I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah.
7. Hear me speedily, O Lord: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit.
8. Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.
9. Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me.
10. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.
11. Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.
12. And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.

PSALM CXLIII

THE CRY OF THE DESOLATE

Psalm cxliii.

HERE is another Davidic Psalm according to the title, uttered in the midst of great distress. It is specially linked with the preceding Psalm, because here also the 'Spirit' is 'overwhelmed' (ver. 4) and 'faileth' (ver. 7). But the extraordinary depth, earnestness, and devoutness of the whole Psalm are unsurpassed. And if the question be asked, in some surprise, how could a Believer, advanced in grace and holiness, as this Psalmist is, have a time of such darkness, as if crying from the pit?—the answer is that sometimes, when God would train a soul to the highest service, He has to subject it to the furnace heated seven times, that only pure gold may remain.

The Cry, and the Pleading.

At the opening of this Psalm we have, as in many other cases, an abrupt cry into God's ear, that arrests every reader. 'Hear my prayer, O Jehovah; give ear; in Thy faithfulness; and in Thy righteousness' (ver. 1). It is an earnest cry, '*Hear* and *give* ear'—and he expects God to listen. 'In Thy faithfulness'—because Thou hast promised to listen to prayer; and 'in Thy righteousness'—for that is concerned in not leaving me to perish.

The Psalmist has had experience of God; he is treading known ground! **Psalm cxliii.**

Is there any reader of the Psalm who is not struck, even arrested, by the statement of ver. 2? 'Enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified'? Other passages not unlike this are found elsewhere (as in Ps. cxxx. 3, 'If Thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?'). But nowhere in the Old Testament is it quite so definite, and so clear, as in this present passage. And be it noted that, though starting from the Psalmist's own case, and beginning a confession by him, it is not confined to him, but includes all good men! It is in a word clearly Gospel teaching, almost Pauline in its sharp decisiveness. It is one of the passages by which Paul proves his case, that it is not by any man's personal character, as good, or pure, or obedient, that he is saved: but only through the Atonement which God has provided, which is able to save any sinner who trusts in it, and without which no one can be saved. Here then the Psalmist, taught of God, in his extremity makes his confession, and teaches us all. **Gospel Ground.**

He is low down indeed as he writes and sings; persecuted; his life smitten to the ground; dwelling in darkness, like the dead of old; his 'spirit overwhelmed'; his 'heart desolate.' Ah! how the memory of happier days haunts him now; how he pauses to meditate, and muse; how he 'stretches forth his hands' (literally, no doubt! for it is no figure of speech, he is in dead earnest); how his **Low Down.**

Psalm cxliii.

soul 'looketh, or longeth, or thirsteth, after God Himself!' Selah! Think of that—the dry, parched, withered, thirsty soul, panting after God!

The Prayer that follows.

'Hear me speedily; my spirit faileth; lest I die!' 'Cause me to hear Thy loving-kindness in the morning!' It will be morning when Thou dost hear and speak; every shadow will flee away! 'I trust in Thee; make me know the way I should walk; I lift up my soul to Thee; deliver me! I flee unto Thee to hide me!' (vers. 8, 9). Could anything be more intense, or more trustful, or more full of longing, to receive and to burst out in new gratitude?

Another Prayer.

But there are deeper depths into which he passes, and asks us to go with him. There is something better than Deliverance, though the need may not be so immediate. 'Teach me to do Thy Will' (ver. 10)—not to *know* it, though that is implied; to know it in the special difficulties of my present position, often very hard to see; and having seen it, to go on 'doing it,' whatever comes! I seem to get a glimpse here of a very wonderful frame of heart, in the midst of such circumstances as the Psalmist's. 'Teach me'; 'lead'; 'quicken'; 'set free'! These are petitions following each other rapidly. And the pleas stated, why God should do so, are God's Name—that it should be honoured, and God's Righteousness—that it should be known. And these pleas are not only spoken, they are *meant*, which is a very different thing, and felt: they are the real motives which induce the Psalmist to ask, and *that* implies a great deal.

Nor must we be disturbed by a petition that follows—'And of Thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all those that afflict my soul' (ver. 12). Of Thy '*mercy*': not, *in Thine anger!* It is often out of mercy to the believer that God has to visit the evil with punishment. Judgment on sinners is always mercy to those who fear God. The world could not exist for one century if God did not judge. And judgment means punishment of necessity. Psalm cxliii.

Hear then the summing up of the whole matter. 'Thou art my God.' A blessed fact, which we cannot overvalue. 'Thy Spirit is good'—the sum of the character of God, than which there is only one more precious in Scripture. 'Lead me into the land of uprightness'—whatever David may have understood by this 'land'—we know what is meant by it, and by God's 'leading us *into* it.' Then comes the concluding word, which means so much—'I am Thy servant.' A servant bound to obey in everything! *And* willing and ready to obey! Unto this he has been brought by Divine discipline, the meaning of which he has come to see!

PSALM CXLIV

1. Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight:
2. My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me.
3. Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him!
4. Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away.
5. Bow thy heavens, O Lord, and come down: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.
6. Cast forth lightning, and scatter them: shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them.
7. Send thine hand from above; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children;
8. Whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood.
9. I will sing a new song unto thee, O God: upon a psaltery and an instrument of ten strings will I sing praises unto thee.
10. It is he that giveth salvation unto kings: who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword.
11. Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood:
12. That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace:
13. That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets:
14. That our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets.
15. Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.

PSALM CXLIV

THE LORD MY HELP

Psalm cxliv.

This is another of the belated Davidic group of Psalms which appears so near the close of the Psalter, possibly because it had been mislaid and was unknown to those who arranged the Psalms at an earlier date.

Echoes of other Psalms.

As we read these opening verses, we seem to be listening to the echoes of others. The 18th Psalm has a striking series of parallel epithets by which God is described (vers. 1, 2). Then the 8th Psalm is recalled by the question of ver. 3—'Lord, what is man, that Thou takest knowledge of him?' But the answer to the question is different (ver. 4): 'Man is like to vanity; his days are as a shadow that passeth away!'

The Prayer.

After this allusion to the insignificance of man, the Psalm passes on in a striking way to adore and plead with God. In contrast with man's littleness, Jehovah is asked to 'bow Thy heavens, and come down; touch the mountains, and they shall smoke' (ver. 5). How grandly the heavens are called *His*, as belonging to Him and at His disposal! He has but 'to *touch* the mountains.' It is Sinai that is in remembrance, with its storm and lightnings. What a contrast with 'the touch' of Christ, which healed disease, and even raised the Dead to life!

Psalm cxliv.

God's Hand.

Another petition not less grand and awful follows. 'Send Thy hand from above; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, and from *sons of a strange land*' (ver. 7). The thought of God's hand being stretched down from heaven, and taking hold of the Psalmist in the storm, and drawing him out of the waters, is a wonderful one. And 'the sons of a strange land' are no doubt the heathen who had held him captive. God needed but to take hold, and he was safe. But deliverance had come. The dark cloudy day had passed away. And with the new blessing had come this 'new song.' It is God that bringeth salvation unto kings. It is God especially who delivereth David from the sword. It is God who had given quiet, peace, and prosperity at home. God was the Father who rejoiced to see David as the father as well as the king. The sons who stood in the palace, the daughters who were as the polished corner-stones — these were blessings which only God could give. He would be no more 'a man of war'; he would be the happy father of children! Prosperity should visit him, like a bright summer smile. Plenty should take up her abode in his fields. The oxen would be strong to labour; ten thousand sheep should wander over his pastures. Such was the happy state which God had given, the peaceful sunset after the cloudy and tempestuous day. And of all the elements of happiness, this was the Crown, as it was also the Secret, that Jehovah was their God, and that they were the people of His pasture and the flock of His care. Happy the family whose Father is God!

PSALM CXLV

1. I will extol thee, my God, O King; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever.
2. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever.
3. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.
4. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.
5. I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.
6. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness.
7. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness.
8. The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.
9. The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.
10. All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee.
11. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power;
12 To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.
13. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.
14. The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.
15. The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season.
16. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.
17. The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.
18. The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.
19. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.
20. The Lord preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy.
21. My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.

PSALM CXLV

O PRAISE THE LORD

Psalm cxlv.

THERE are three things which warn us that in dealing with this Psalm we are touching something that was held very sacred. Its inscription, found in the Sept., is that it was David's song of praise, which at least shows what generations of Jews thought and felt about it. It is called *Tehillah*—in Hebrew—and is the only Psalm so called; while the entire book which we name the Psalter is called *Tehillim*—the Book of Praises; almost as if this Psalm had given the title to it all. And visible still over the door of the ruined Mosque at Damascus, is inscribed the verse (ver. 13), 'Thy Kingdom, O Christ! is an everlasting Kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.' So that with prepared hearts we come to the study of this Psalm. A Jewish Rabbi says of it, 'Before you pray, repeat or read Ps. cxlv.' Let us learn of this Jew.

It is an alphabetical Psalm with one letter (near the centre of the alphabet) omitted—an exercise, therefore, like many others, of a man with time on his hands, who wished to spend it, after his manner, in the service of God. It is full of praise from beginning to end. I challenge contradiction of the statement that in no Christian language have we a

hymn or song in honour of God to be compared with this, in the fullness, the joyfulness, the exuberance of its adoration. It not so much prayer: the prayer is absorbed in praises. Psalm cxlv.

It begins with four 'I wills.' '*I will* extol Thee,' '*I will* bless Thy Name,' '*I will* bless Thee every day,' '*I will* praise Thy Name for ever.' And these come so naturally that we have no feeling of the artificial. Four I Wills.

Here he pauses to give the reason for the outburst which he could not control. It is the greatness of Jehovah, a greatness which is 'unsearchable'—as if he had sat in silence, seeking in vain to reach the bottom with his plummet; and a greatness which 'generation after generation' shall declare, the fathers speaking to the children, and the children to the grandchildren, and never finding that the subject was exhausted. We like to have a Psalmist teaching us, who has passed through such an experience! Again he speaks: it is of 'the glorious honour of Thy Majesty' (as if he were looking upon it); of 'Thy mighty acts'; 'Thy wondrous works'; 'Thy terrible acts'; 'Thy greatness'; Thy great goodness'; 'Thy righteousness.' So it runs on, not from feebleness of thought or language, but from the fullness of the heart; as if to show us the meaning of our Lord's promise—'Out of him shall flow rivers of living water.' God's Greatness.

He began with the greatness of Jehovah, but already we detect a difference of tone. And now the change is all but complete. It is the *graciousness* of Jehovah on which he is now to dwell. The Graciousness.

Psalm cxlv.

'compassion,' the 'long-suffering,' the 'great mercy.' (Note the margin—'great in mercy.') He is 'good to *all*.' His 'tender mercies' are over 'all His Works.' There is something that he cannot overdo. He cannot weary of telling of that. Do we ever weary of hearing it? Have we ever looked on at the greatness of Jehovah till we were all but terrified, and then taken home the blessedness of the other side of God's character, His *tenderness*? Nothing else in the sweep and circle of our knowledge so unites these two things. Nature never does. But God—God in Christ—does so perfectly. The danger rather is that we forget the greatness while we rejoice in the tenderness. 'Can the mother forget? . . . She may: yet will I never forget thee!'

The Saints and the Glory.

From such thoughts the Psalmist passes on to what the Saints, the holy ones, do. They shall 'speak,' and 'talk,' and 'make known unto the sons of men' the majesty of God's kingdom. Is it not of the angelic company that he is thinking now? As if they who 'stand in the Presence of Jehovah' were speaking to us of the glory which they are seeing! And it is here the verse comes in which has for so many centuries stood braving sun and wind on the Damascus wall. 'Thy Kingdom' (and the words have been added, *O Christ!*) 'is an everlasting Kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations!' What a testimony this one verse has given, standing where it does, to the generations which have come and gone upon the Syrian plain!

But here again the Psalmist turns to the poor and the feeble. 'To those that fall' and 'those that be bowed down.' For 'Jehovah upholdeth' the one and 'raiseth up' the other. So that 'the eyes of all wait upon Thee; Thou givest them their meat; Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing!' Four times in the Psalm does the description of God pass into a prayer unto God, as it always does when we write or speak with our eyes fixed upon Him. And when we turn our eyes again upon the works of God we find them 'satisfied.' First it is 'the desire of every living thing' (ver. 16), and then specially it is 'the desire of them that fear Him' (ver 19). A deeper desire, of which others know nothing, but which God loves above anything else, 'to be satisfied.' 'O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and filled with the Blessing of Jehovah' (Deut. xxxiii. 23).

Psalm cxlv.

Those that Fall.

Yet one more word. It is and ever must be 'a holy name' (ver. 21). The last word. Nothing can stand in the way of this. The wicked *must* receive their portion: all those that 'love Him' (blessed word!) are preserved: and so 'my mouth,' nay, 'all flesh,' shall bless and speak the praise of 'His Holy Name' for ever and ever!

Righteousness.

PSALM CXLVI

1. Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul.
2. While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.
3. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.
4. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.
5. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God;
6. Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is; which keepeth truth for ever:
7. Which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry. The Lord looseth the prisoners:
8. The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind: the Lord raiseth them that are bowed down: the Lord loveth the righteous:
9. The Lord preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.
10. The Lord shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the Lord.

PSALM CXLVI

TRUST IN JEHOVAH: HALLELU-JAH

Psalm cxlvi.

THIS is the beginning of the last group of Psalms in the Psalter, the final Hallelu-Jah Psalms—the dying outburst in song of the Jewish Dispensation in Scripture, probably the last word written in our Old Testament, to throw back its light upon all the books and all the messages before it, to anticipate the Dawning of the Morning of the Son of Man, the Lark's Song to meet the Morning-Star. Like the other members of this group, this Psalm asks for nothing; it is satisfied just to look on, to admire, to wonder, to adore Jehovah.

All, and chiefly *Me*.

It begins by calling upon all to praise God. *Hallelu-Jah!* And thou, O my soul, do *thou* begin! Yes! yes! so long as I live, here or anywhere, I will! That shall be my occupation: 'I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.' Note the occupation of my life, *singing*, and singing *praises*. Note its duration—'while I have *any* being,' higher or lower, or the same as now, nothing can drive me from it, or tempt me to something else; and note the appropriative faith which is explanation of my life henceforth. MY God! And if you ask a further reason, it has been the ex-

Psalm cxlvi.

perience of life in the past. I have learned, and pass on the lesson to you, to put no trust in man, not even in the princes of the earth, of whom I have known many. They are all frail: Dust, and the children of Dust. You seek *salvation?* There is no salvation to be found in man. His life is a breath! he breathes it out, to return whence he came. 'Dust thou art, and unto Dust shalt thou return!' In a day, in a moment, his thoughts perish. Death is at the door.

But JAH!

But *Hallelu-Jah!* You cannot praise HIM enough! And the Psalmist proceeds to sing of twelve reasons why you and I should praise God, and trust in God.

He is the '*God of Jacob*' (ver. 5); and you may read how He was Salvation to His servant of old. Happy he whose trust is in Jehovah his God: there is present help and future hope in Him.

He is the Creator (ver. 6) 'who made Heaven, Earth, and the Sea.' The A.V. says, '*Which* made'; and so in the Lord's Prayer, 'Our Father *which* art.' I remember defending this against a venerable friend who thought it must be wrong. But I maintained then, and do so still, that words implying *gender* have no reference whatever to the Eternal God. And my friend saw it with surprise. '*Which* made Heaven and Earth!' (ver. 6).

He is faithful: 'He keepeth Truth for ever!' (ver. 6). If there is anything in the Universe on which we can absolutely rely, it is on a promise or word of God. The Universe itself depends on His character—it is founded on this Rock.

'He is the Judge of the oppressed' (ver. 7); and woe to the oppressors when that judgment has begun. Psalm cxlvi.

He is the provider of food (ver. 8)—'Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'

He is the 'Deliverer of the prisoners' (ver. 7). Is it not written, 'Jehovah hath anointed ME (His Messiah) . . . to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound!' (Isai. lxi. 1).

'He maketh the blind to see' (here we have a list of the chief miracles which Jesus Christ was to do on earth, and little did the Psalmist or his readers dream of the feast he was setting before them, so many hundred years before the fulfilment came!); He 'raiseth up them that are bowed down!' He loveth the righteous; He preserveth the strangers; He relieveth (setteth up) the fatherless and the widow; He is the Avenger of them who are trodden down; He is the King (ver. 10) which shall reign for ever; He is Thy God, O Zion! to 'all generations.' Wherefore set your trust upon God. *Hallelu-Jah!*

PSALM CXLVII

1. Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.
2. The Lord doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.
3. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.
4. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.
5. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.
6. The Lord lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground.
7. Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God:
8. Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.
9. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.
10. He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man.
11. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.
12. Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion.
13. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee.
14. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat.
15. He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly.
16. He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoar-frost like ashes.
17. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold?
18. He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow.
19. He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel.
20. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord.

PSALM CXLVII

THE JOY OF PRAISING GOD

THIS is the second of the Hallelu-Jah group of five Psalms with which the Psalter closes; and though the reader will not fail to observe that there is considerable sameness in the line of thought, as is perhaps inevitable when the heart is on fire and its reach is highest, yet there comes along with this, the wonderful sensation of the pure air of the mountain-top, the great vision seen from the heights, and the sweeter poetical touch that rests on the Psalmist's pen. The new man who cannot help singing is looking out on a new world. The old things have been transfigured. He is on Tabor. **Psalm cxlvii.**

Is it hard to be always singing Psalms? hard and doleful? If such a thought has entered the mind of anyone, let him seriously think on what it means where a man begins his song, as this Psalmist does —HALLELU-JAH! 'It is good to sing praises unto *our* God.' It is 'good'; it is 'pleasant'; it is 'beautiful.' **Good and Beautiful.**

And then, as if a reason for such strong words had been asked, he proceeds to give them one by one, as a nightingale pours forth the notes of *his* song, so fast and full, as if music could not provide notes enough to tell. He does not dwell on anyone

Psalm cxlvii.

of the many themes and illustrations; one suggestion is enough, one note is all that can be opened—there are so many. God is 'the Builder of Jerusalem' (ver. 1), being rebuilt after the ruins made by the enemy; He is the 'gatherer' (ver. 1) of those who had been dispersed far and wide; He is the 'healer of broken hearts' (ver. 3)—how true! and the only Healer of them; He is the true Physician and Surgeon, dealing with all wounds and all diseases without fail; He is Lord of the stars, has given each one of them a name (ver. 4), knows its history, and is watching over it. He is 'Great' and 'of great power,' and 'His understanding is infinite' (ver. 5), going down to the very little things and making them as carefully as the great works of His hand. He 'lifteth up the meek' (ver. 6)—bless His Name! *not* the pretentious, or the self-sufficient, or the proud, or the cruel, but 'the meek.' He overthrows 'the wicked as they stand' (ver. 6).

His Mercy.

Sing, therefore (ver. 7), thank, praise, our God! The earth is His, for He made it. And He rules it in daily life. Not a cloud covereth the sky, not a drop of rain falls on the mountains, not a blade of grass grows on the house-top but by Him! The beast cries in the desert, and God hears and gives! The raven and her young are hungry in the nest, and God bestows their food. It is not the strong things that He delights in, horse or man, but the feeble which need. It is the man who fears Him, and hopes in His mercy, that He specially remembers.

O Zion!

Wherefore, Praise Jehovah, O Jerusalem: He is

thy God, O Zion (ver. 12). Remember what He has done for thee: 'thy gates are strengthened now: thy children within thee are safe, and they are blessed' (ver. 13). He hath given peace in thy borders, and filled thy gates with the finest wheat (ver. 14). Nature has obeyed Him, and He has guided it for thy good. The snow and the hoar-frost, the ice and the cold, are His; He breathes upon them, and they melt and disappear. His Word is obeyed in Nature; but His precious Word He hath also given to Jacob. The Lord of the world wide is the God of Israel. Hath He ever done to another people what He has done for *thee?* Wherefore sing unto His name. Be not forgetful. Let thy heart and thy song go forth to-day: HALLELUJAH! Psalm cxlvii.

PSALM CXLVIII

1. Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights.
2. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts.
3. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light.
4. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens.
5. Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were created.
6. He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass.
7. Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps:
8. Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word:
9. Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars:
10. Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl:
11. Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth:
12. Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children:
13. Let them praise the name of the Lord: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.
14. He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the Lord.

PSALM CXLVIII

THE SONG OF CREATION: HALLELU-JAH!

In this Psalm we may specially note that there is no petition nor request presented to Jehovah; that in a word, this is not prayer, but praise. There are thirteen calls to praise, each giving a new reason, drawn from creation, for the true and real adoration of God. All creatures are called on to praise Him. The call begins from above, in the highest heavens (vers. 1-6); it is then made to the earth and all therein (vers. 7-13); and it concludes with Israel, on whom it is specially urged. **Psalm cxlviii.**

By various names the heavens are called on to give praise to God: 'The Heavens,' the 'Heights,' His 'Angels,' His 'Hosts,' the 'Sun and Moon,' the 'Stars of Light,' the 'Heavens of Heavens,' and the 'Waters which be above the Heavens.' It is almost impossible to say what each of these distinctively may be. We must almost take for granted that the Psalmist himself used each word with a separate meaning. The 'heavens' in ver. 1 must be a general term for all; the 'heights' an allusion to the great distance they have above the earth; the 'angels' need no definition; the 'hosts' (ver. 2) are supposed **The Heavens.**

Psalm cxlviii.

by some to include both 'heavenly beings and heavenly bodies,' though it might be well to limit the term to those groups of angels which sing together, in contradistinction from individual angels, who are often represented as alone; the sun and moon and stars are easily understood, and the 'waters above the heavens' represent the source of rain, which is so great a necessity and blessing in the Eastern world. The phrase which does need a word of exposition is the 'heavens of heavens'—here used distinctively—and probably refers to the Jewish belief, that there are various localities or worlds called 'heavens.' St Paul speaks definitely of 'the third heaven' to which he was taken up (2 Cor. xii. 2). The curious Apocryphal book called the Ascension of Isaiah describes seven places or heavens to which, one by one, he was taken up in a dream, and which is curious as preserving for us the Jewish belief, though it has no warrant from Scripture. Some such belief, though possibly more limited and guarded, was in the Psalmist's mind. What he does here is to call on all the heavenly places and persons to lift up their voices and to sing praise to the great Jehovah, the Maker and Preserver of them all. HE created them—a great emphasis is placed upon the 'He'; He 'stablished' them; He hath made a 'decree which shall not pass' (ver. 6). It is not the places which shall not pass away: but the decree itself. Perhaps the meaning is that they cannot shake the decree, and have no power over it, whose creatures they are.

From this grand appeal to the heavens above, the writer of the Psalm turns to the earth and its inhabitants to join the great song for which he is waiting. In vers. 7-13 he speaks to the various members of the lower creation—the earth itself; the sea-dragons and the deeps in which they swim or creep; to the winds, the lightnings, the rain and hail; to the hills and mountains. Then he calls on beasts and cattle and creeping things and birds of the air. Then coming to men, he asks them all, of all kinds, classes, and ages, from the kings seated on thrones, and the judges and princes down to the poor, from old men down to boys and children, to join him and the creation in praising the Lord. His Name, His Glory, are excellent and great.

Psalm cxlviii. The Earth.

And then once more, to complete his climax, to make his chorus full, there is another voice which must not be wanting. Israel (ver. 14) is needed. No praise of God can be enough in which Jewish voices are not heard. The children of His friend Abraham, the children of the Promise, they are very dear to God; 'a people *near unto Him.*' It is a singular word to come here. It has been often used before in the language of history, when prophets and priests were told to 'draw nigh to God, and He would draw nigh to them.' But here it means something more. It includes the nearness of place, the nearness of affection, the nearness—if I may call it so—the *nearness of Blood!* In heaven, the group of singers near the Throne was that of Israel. Those near the heart of God

Israel.

Psalm cxlviii.

were Israel. Those of the same Blood with the Son of God were, like Himself, children of Abraham. And it is daring, it is blessed, it is Heaven-taught—that he leaves this thought in the mind, projecting it into the silence which follows his *Hallelu-Jah.*

PSALM CXLIX

1. Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.
2. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.
3. Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp.
4. For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.
5. Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds.
6. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand;
7. To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people;
8. To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron;
9. To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the Lord.

PSALM CXLIX

A NEW SONG!

Psalm cxlix.

A NEW Song! To come at the very close of the Psalter! After one hundred and forty-eight Psalms have already been sung in the Temple or the closet! Can we believe that any one note of the gamut of praise has been omitted or lost, after all the Psalms that have been written and sung for centuries? Can it be new for us? Can we take home to ourselves the assurance that the Infinite Majesty of Jehovah is an inexhaustible theme of song, both now and hereafter? Is it surprising that 'the new man' should be full of new songs?

Israel and the Saints.

The two subjects of the Psalm are announced in the second verse. They are Israel and the Saints.

Israel.

Israel is the subject in vers. 2-4; or rather the call on Israel to give praise to Jehovah comes first. God is regarded here both as a Father and as a King. In the sense of Father, God is here called the Maker of Israel. It is something more than Creation that is meant; for that could be said of any nation. The Fatherhood of God is a precious thought which His own people could cherish, and did. He was also their King. In memorable words, God had spoken to Samuel, when the people asked for an earthly king. They then rejected God as

their King. That was true. But time after time the language of Psalmist and Prophet had been 'Jehovah is our King' (Isa. xxxiii. 22). 'Thy God reigneth' (Isa. lii. 7). 'The Holy One of Israel our king' (Ps. lxxii. 18, R.V. mar.). We put both titles together, and find that Israel's 'Father' was 'the King, Eternal, Immortal, Invisible' (1 Tim. i. 17). Each one of the true Israel was 'the Son of the King.' His glory and His Fatherly love went together, and anointed the people of His choice. *This* is the New Song. Psalm cxlix.

It asks that Israel shall praise Jehovah 'in the dance,' with 'timbrel and harp.' These associations are far away from us, or from most of us. In olden time, the dance began by being a sacred thing, as expressing what nothing else then could do, a state of joy which asked for every graceful motion of the body; and the only dances known were then modes of worship. It is hard to believe, but it is true. And the highest and noblest instruments of music were similarly dedicated to the dance. It was then the highest expression of wonder and joy. Alas! how has this great power fallen! And what an astonishment would it be to us, were it possible to find it rescued and restored to its ancient purposes! How are Israel to Praise?

Two reasons are given in the Psalm why the worship of Jehovah should be so exuberant and ecstatic. The one is that He takes such pleasure in His people, and the other is that He is going to do so much for them (ver. 4). These thoughts are beautifully put here in a single verse. Jehovah, whose glory is unspeakable, takes delight in His Why should Israel so Praise?

Psalm cxlix.

people, as a father does in his children. When we take home that thought, which is done only by faith, the marvel of it comes to our hearts. When we really know it, we think we could live upon it. And then, the Future! Our A.V., after all, is the truest translation of this: '*He will beautify the meek with salvation.*' There are many promises to the meek, but this is the best of them all. Note the three things. They are 'the meek,' one of the sweetest descriptions of Christian character in Scripture. They are to be 'saved,' with all that that implies, both *from* and *to*. And as the result they are to be, not only *safe*, but *beautiful*, with the beauty of the Lord Jehovah Himself!

The Saints.

We turn to the second part of the Psalm, to what it says of 'The Saints.' They are the '*Chasidim*,' a word so full of meaning that it cannot be rendered by any one English word. The root idea in it is of the Holiness of God, and it must be understood to mean just that amount and kind of Divine Holiness which can be imparted to men. It therefore covers the best of earth, and also the character of those who are in heaven. Strangely enough, the call to them in this Psalm (ver. 5) is 'to be joyful in glory,' not in their own glory, but in Jehovah's, reciprocating, if one dare say so, the 'pleasure' which the Father has in His children. They are also to 'sing aloud upon their beds.' The allusion is difficult. It might at first seem to mean that they should spend the night in praise, instead of resting in their beds. But the expression in that case would be unnatural. It probably means that the waking

hours of night should be spent in joyful communing with God, *so* joyful that it must find vent in vocal praise. At all events, their lives are to be so blessed and joyful that their mouths are to be 'filled with the praises,' 'the high praises,' of Jehovah. Psalm cxlix.

There follows a promise whose meaning it is very hard to define. The saints of God are to see victory come for Him, in which they shall themselves have a share. 'The praises of God are to be in their mouths': yes, that is easy to understand. But, it is added, 'a two-edged sword is to be in their hands' (ver. 6). It is a promise which was quite intelligible in the case of David, or some Jewish king or captain. At the head of a victorious army he should pass on 'conquering and to conquer.' It is God's promise to a king, to a magistrate, to a judge, to a captain. In days yet to come, days of the last struggle, the servants of God will no doubt often have to fight for Him, and they will prevail. Whether in this literal, or in a figurative and spiritual sense, such a post of victory shall be theirs. 'Such honour have all His saints.' And this is part of the 'New Song,' which the Psalmist has already begun to sing! Victory for God.

PSALM CL

1. Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.
2. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.
3. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp.
4. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.
5. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.
6. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.

PSALM CL

HALLELU-JAH!

Psalm cl.

THE last of the Psalms! (One has indeed been added in the Septuagint Greek, but never had any place in the Hebrew.) Was it written under the expectation that it would close the Book, as its Amen? Probably not. There is no foundation for such a supposition. If not, it was no ordinary wisdom that placed it where it is. And what circumstances, yes! and what spirit, could have led to the framing of such a song? The Spirit of God inspired it; but of what man, or of what incidents, He availed Himself for the purpose, we know not. There is no other Psalm which could fittingly take its place. It absolutely fits and fills it! It contains thirteen calls to praise, and strikingly responds to the thirteen phases of Divine Glory revealed to Moses in Exod. xxxiv. 6. No other hymn of praise written in any language, by any human pen, reaches on the whole such a level. Only John the Apostle heard any like it, when he heard in Patmos the Song of the Redeemed.

Four Questions.

The Psalm is a call to praise God, and it answers the four questions—Where? Why? How? Who?

Where?

Where should God be praised? Two places are

Psalm cl. mentioned here—His Sanctuary, and the Firmament of His Power. The 'Sanctuary' is (contrary to expectation) the less definite of the two. It cannot be confined to Zion or the Temple. It cannot be bounded by synagogue or congregation. It might be rendered 'in Holiness.' But it means *Holiness as located* on earth. The highway, or the closet, may claim the Song of Praise, as well as the Temple. Then the firmament of God's power is suggested by the angel's song, 'Glory to God in the Highest. We need never cease praising God, from a fear that the place is not appropriate. Even if we only sing in our heart.

Why? *Why* should we praise God? The Psalmist gives only two reasons here, but they are all comprehensive. Because of what He *has done!* and because of what He *is!* The former includes and rests on all the Revelation of God's works in Nature and in Grace, in the World and in the Church. The Double Story of Creation and Redemption is embraced by it. But beyond and above the history is God Himself, so far as we know Him, through His Word. That is a Higher and a more mysterious thing. And it inspires a more wonderful, if sometimes it be a wordless song! 'His excellent greatness!'

How? *How* are we to praise God? The Psalm has various answers to the question. Nine ways are specified. So early as the time of Miriam, the Jews did this in a dance, and continued so to do for many centuries. The Christian world has in the meantime lost the secret which made that possible.

The dance has been captured by the world, if not by some one worse. Eight instruments of music are mentioned in the Psalm; some that were played by women, some by Levites, some by priests. Probably the thought which is conveyed to us by the verses is the great variety of people and nations and ways by whom and in which God may be, and yet shall be praised. All nations, kindreds, peoples and tongues shall yet swell the praise of the Lord! Pslam cl.

And this brings us to the last of the questions answered in the Psalm. *Who* are to praise God? The answer in two words is, *All the Saved*, as well as all *the Unfallen Above*. We go to the Book of Revelation to see this, and already to hear them. Israel is there, singing the Song of Moses and the Lamb! They are the 'Bride of Christ.' The Church of Christ is there, from 'all nations under heaven'; they are 'members of the Body' of Christ! Angels are there, once so much higher, hereafter to be not so high as the Redeemed Family. 'Let every thing that hath breath praise Jehovah,' says the Psalm. Rather we may render it,—'Let *every breath*' praise Him! every pulse, every beating of the heart, every breath we breathe: in a word, all our life, every faculty, and at every moment! Such is the final call of the Book of Psalms. Is it less striking, less comprehensive, less exalting than the Apocalypse of St John (Rev. vii. 9-12)? He saw (if we dare so): but the Psalmist sings by faith, and we with him. In a word, he takes us into heaven, or near enough to hear what is going on! And he leaves Who?

Psalm cl.

us there! And as his voice falls into silence we seem to hear, dimly, as from a distance, something that we take to be—

Holy, Holy, Holy, LORD GOD ALMIGHTY!
Which was, and is, AND IS TO COME!

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